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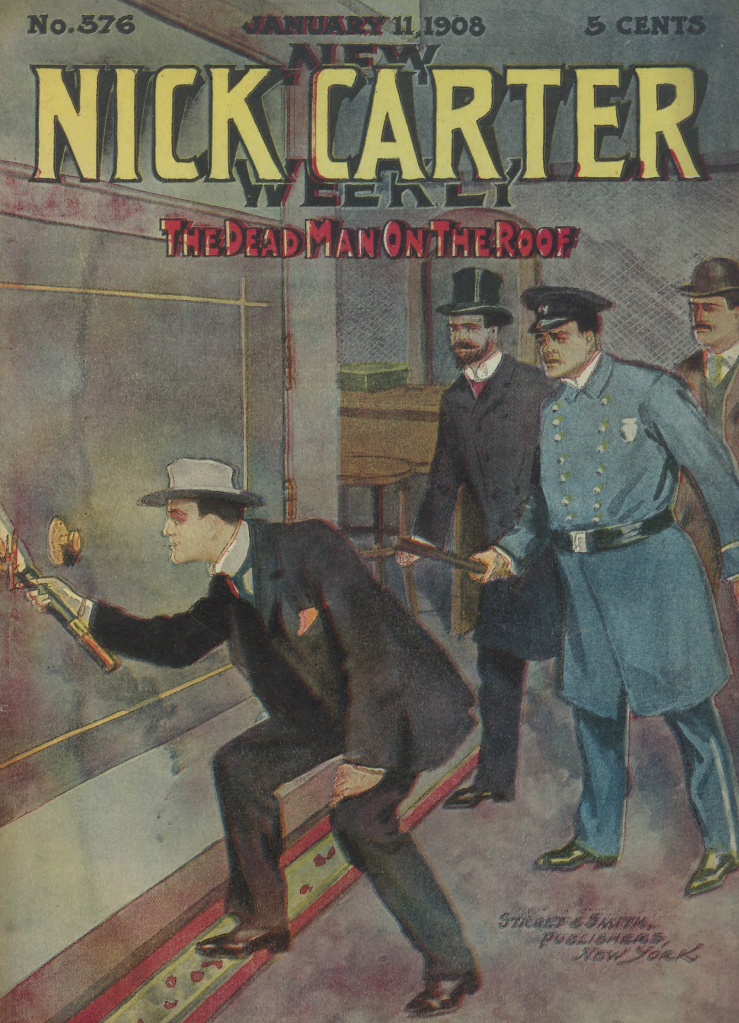
# NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

## THE DEAD MAN ON THE ROOF



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NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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# The Dead Man on the Roof;

## OR,

## Nick Carter Clears an Honored Name.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT.

It was rather a blustery night, with slanting sheets of stinging rain chasing each other, now and then, through the cross-streets toward the East River, when Nick Carter and his young assistant, Patsy Garvan, turned briskly from Lexington Avenue, walking east themselves, and so got the wind and rain at their backs, enabling them to draw breath more freely and exchange some conversation.

"I am convinced that you have done well, Patsy," said the detective. "The girl is in good hands, is in a fair way to earn her own living when she has been to the business school a while longer, and now that I have assumed the debt she owed to young Strusse, her mind will be at ease.

"Of course, I might sift her story, learn her guardian's name, and try to bring about a better understanding between them; but I'm free to confess I think her better off here, in a good home and under good influences. Your first opinion of her was correct, Patsy, I feel sure."

"You bet!" returned the young fellow emphatically. "She's all the goods, is Miss I-don't-care!"

They were speaking of a very pretty young girl whom young Harold Strusse, son of a Wood Pulp Trust director, had fallen in with during his meteoric career as a "spender" on the Great White Way. Harold had stolen funds and jewelry belonging to a client of his employers, Messrs. Gresham, Harrity & Polk, and had wasted the small fortune so come by in a few weeks of riotous living in the Tenderloin, during which escapade he had met the young girl mentioned and given her a peculiar-looking antique brooch, set with a yellow beryl.*

It was through this young lady's wearing of the yellow beryl that Patsy, aided by his chief, had been enabled to trace Harold Strusse's thievery and put it up to his father, the millionaire. Nick Carter had an old score to settle with the Wood Pulp Trust director, and he wasted little sympathy on the rich man when his son went wrong.

Strusse senior had played a most scurvy trick upon his own ward, Miss Sallie O'Neil; Nick had discovered the millionaire's crooked work, but, rather than bring further sorrow to Miss O'Neil, and break up the family entirely, he had not revealed his knowledge of Strusse's guilt.

The "girl with the yellow beryl," Miss I-don't-care, as Patsy called her, had interested that impressionable

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, Nos. 574 and 575.

young Irish lad immensely. As the brief conversation above goes to show, on this rainy night Nick Carter and his assistant had finally settled satisfactorily some matters for this young lady, who had, alone and friendless, come to New York to seek her fortune, although being, in fact, heiress to considerable property in the West.

Nick Carter's chuckle had scarce died in his throat—for he had been amused by Patsy's enthusiasm, knowing the impressionable nature of the youngster—when suddenly a streak of white electric-lamp light which had blazed upon the wet sidewalk before them was extinguished like a snuffed candle!

They were half-way through the block. It had been a dark one, save for two incandescents between the cornesr and the blazing window of a small shop. There was a big globe in the window of the shop, and its radiance had made several square yards before its door as bright as day.

"Hello! what's this?" ejaculated the detective.

"Somebody's doused the glim suddenly," returned Patsy carelessly, never breaking his stride.

But when he saw that Nick had slowed down, he halted, too. His mentor was not looking toward the suddenly darkened front of the store, but across the street.

In the dim light from the street-lamps, the sign of an undertaker's shop was to be seen over there. A single small light had been burning in that window, too.

"Say! These fellows around here all seem to turn out their electric lights at once, eh?" suggested Patsy.

"And up in that house, likewise—see! On the second floor," said Nick. "There! somebody is lighting the gas in that room."

"Something's happened to the electric-lighting plant in this district."

"You are right there, Patsy. Yes! There were lights in that drug-store on the corner. They are lighting the gas there."

"Well! shall we go on?" demanded the younger man, anxious to get a car that would shelter them on their way home.

"Wait a moment."

Nick put down the umbrella and stepped into the store beside them, where the proprietor was lighting a hand-lamp, evidently being without gas.

"Hello! The juice gone back on you?" Nick asked cordially, approaching the cigar-counter.

"Mein cracious! yah!" grunted the fat German, waddling behind the counter. "De gas pe so pad, an' gost so mooch, dot I t'ought me, vell, I haf elegtricity. Und now loog!"

"Does it often happen?"

"I haf it in zwei mont's. Not so pefore."

"It doesn't often happen, then. The circuit has been good?" queried Nick, with seeming idle curiosity as he selected a handful of cigars.

"Oh, yah! But v'y for do I pay for light if dot light don't come—huh?"

"Why, indeed!" remarked Nick, as he went out, thoughtfully.

Patsy was waiting impatiently. He was surprised to see his chief so much interested in a small matter—a matter which, for the life of him, he could attach no importance to.

"Say, Mr. Carter! You don't think anybody's pinched the lights, do you?" he asked, grinning.

Nick chuckled again.

"Perhaps."

"Swiped the juice, eh? Run away with the electricity that belongs in this district?"

"Well, it's no small displacement, or obstruction. You see, the electricity seems to have been turned off in this neighborhood.

"The street-lights on the corners are still burning."

"Of course."

"Well?"

"Well, my boy," said Nick, "they're fed from an entirely different cable, of course. It's the store and house lights that have been shut off."

"I see that. But what of it?"

"Perhaps nothing of it; yet——"

"There's something that struck you about it. You saw something that I didn't?" queried Patsy seriously.

"So it seems. At least, I noted something on the instant the current was cut off that startled me," admitted Carter.

"What was it, sir?"

"Say! The district power-house is only a block and a half away. Let's go around there, Patsy. We're wet, anyway, and it isn't far."

"Aw, well, sir, if you say so, we'll go," declared his young assistant. "But I don't see the why-for."

"Humph! There may be nothing in it," muttered Nick. "And then again——"

He shook his head, but set out in a quick stride for the corner they had just turned, and so led the way down Lexington Avenue again. Patsy followed, somewhat puzzled, and a good deal disappointed that their home-going was retarded.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FLASH IN THE SKY.

Now, this jumping at a conclusion was not at all like Nicholas Carter, and Patsy well knew it. The great detective was usually the most cautious and confident of men—too cautious to grasp at a suspicion without having some basis for it, and always confident when he started on a line of investigation that there was, in the words of the old saying, "some fire where there was so much smoke."

But, as far as Patsy could see, this simple incident could be productive of no matter of importance. He had seen or heard nothing out of the way. The mere fact that the electric lights on a certain circuit had suddenly gone out meant nothing to him.

Nick Carter, however, hurried on toward the power-station without a word of explanation, and plainly with his mind deeply engaged in some phase of the matter that his young assistant was not wise to. They arrived in ten minutes at the station, and the detective rang the bell beside the office door. There was a light inside and some bustle, but, of course, at this hour, the place was locked.

In a few minutes the door opened, and a man in his shirt-sleeves looked out. The roaring of the dynamos was then more apparent, and there was a rhythmic jar in the air, and even in the floor, as they stepped over the threshold.

"What's wanted, gentlemen?" asked the man briskly.

"You've had a break somewhere in the neighborhood?" suggested the detective.

"Well, what of it?" and the man spoke with some vexation. "It will be repaired as quickly as we can locate it."

"An ordinary break?"

"I can't tell you that. It may take an hour to locate and repair it. Maybe longer."

"Will you let me look at the chart of the line which has given out?"

"Why, sir, I don't——"

Nick passed him his card, and the fellow's manner changed at once when he read the detective's name.

"Why, I'll see what I can do. Is—is there anything in your line about this, Mr. Carter?"

"I really don't know," replied the detective frankly. "Suppose we call it curiosity on my part. Can I see the chart?"

The man, who was night superintendent of the house, turned on the light over a desk and brought forth a book of plates and charts. He opened it to the district and pointed out the particular wire that had given out. It was a good-sized power-and-light supply cable, and furnished the juice over a considerable territory. Of course, it was laid mostly in conduits underground; but some of the branches were on the roofs.

"Now, it isn't this main cable that has given out?" queried Carter.

"Oh, no, sir. Here's the branch affected."

"Ah! so I thought. It gives juice to these two blocks and part of the third—eh?"

"Quite right, sir."

Nick examined the squares in silence for a moment, running his forefinger over the named and numbered squares which represented the various houses on the blocks in question. The point of his finger lingered upon one block, and finally hovered over a particular house.

"That is the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, sir."

"You supply them with light, of course?"

"No, sir. But that line is fastened to their roof. I don't think the break is there. We have men out tracing it now."

"Very well, sir. Now, one more question."

"Yes, sir?"

"When a current of electricity is suddenly short-circuited—a powerful current, I mean—there is very likely to be a brilliant discharge of flame?"

"There is more or less combustion—yes."

"Of what color?"

"Why, sir, that depends."

"Upon what?"

"Why, upon the manner in which the short-circuit is established——"

"And the nature of the conductor through which it is established?" interposed Nick Carter.

"Er—yes."

"Suppose you saw against the sky-line, at the very instant the lights went out on this circuit, a brilliant flash of purple light, melting to crimson, and then blazing yellow—saffron yellow—for an instant? What would you say?"

The superintendent stared at the detective for fully a minute without speaking. The question seemed to startle and yet puzzle him.

"Is that what you saw, sir?" he murmured at last.

"It is."

"Do you know anything—er—about electricity?"

"Something about it. Some of its peculiarities are familiar to me," admitted Nick.

"Where was this?"

Nick told him the street they were on when the lights went out.

"And you evidently saw this flash against the sky to the south?"

"I did. Over the roofs on the south side of the street."

"I—I—— Mr. Carter! Wait till I get my coat and hat and I will go with you. You think you know where this happened?" asked the superintendent, suddenly showing much excitement.

"I see a possibility," admitted Nick.

"Come on! We'll go there," declared the man, and, shouting for an assistant to look out for the office, the superintendent opened the door and led the way into the rain.

The storm was heavier now. Patsy paddled on behind his chief and the electrician in considerable bewilderment. He could not for the life of him understand why

Nick should be so deeply interested in the mere breaking of an electric power-wire.

They faced the wind and rain for half a block, and then got it at their backs again. They were hurriedly walking east once more, but on one street farther south than that upon which Nick Carter and Patsy had stood when the former's attention had been called to the break in the electric-light service of the neighborhood.

Gaslights glimmered here and there in place of the white glare of the electrics, so it was plain that the break had not yet been discovered by the linemen.

Patsy was, to tell the truth, a bit sore in his feelings. Nick Carter had not taken him into his confidence, and he did not see what his chief was up to at all. What if there had been a break—why was it a matter for so much worriment?

As for Nick himself, and the superintendent, they, too, were silent as they hurried along the wet street with the rain drumming on their umbrellas. Each was busy with his own thoughts, and the face of the electrician showed great disturbance of mind.

As they settled into a long stride, with the wind and rain beating behind them, a pedestrian—the sole individual apparent upon the block—suddenly darted out of the basement of a private house and approached the trio. He was a man in an evident hurry, and, although he held an umbrella over his head, he wore no hat.

His haste was not to be mistaken. He rushed up the area-steps and started along the block, headlong. In a moment he almost ran into the arms of Nick Carter.

The detective favored him with a single glance. He was a white-faced man, not old, and his eyes were black and staring. There was a not altogether sane look in his face, yet the glance Nick obtained of the passing stranger was but momentary, and really made little impression upon his mind—then!

He dodged, slipped by Nick and the electrician, and instantly was gone. Neither the detective nor the superintendent of the electric-station commented upon his odd appearance.

A few moments later they arrived at the front of a solid-looking granite building, the entrance to which was upon the very corner of the avenue. Over the door, carved in the arch, was the name of the institution—"Fruiterers' Exchange Bank."

The electrician turned to look at Nick; the latter had turned to speak to Patsy.

"Mr. Carter——"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Nick.

Patsy had disappeared!

"Where's that boy of mine?" the detective murmured.

"Your friend didn't come?" queried the electrician.

"Humph!" muttered Nick noncommitally.

He knew that Patsy had been directly behind them when they turned into this street. Why had he gone back? What had taken him away so suddenly—and without a word of explanation?

"Well, can we raise the watchman?" asked the electrician, interrupting Nick's train of thought.

"There's a night-bell here somewhere. You *don't* furnish the light for this building, I see?"

"No, sir. It was built before the company established the power-house in this district."

Meanwhile the detective had been fumbling about the grillwork on the right side of the main entrance. Suddenly he discovered the push-button, and punched it hard. They heard no sound, but that was not surprising, as the bell undoubtedly rang in some distant part of the banking-offices.

However, when several minutes had passed, and there was no sound of the watchman inside, and Nick had punched the button several times, both men grew impatient.

"We're wasting time, Mr. Carter," said the electrician.

"We certainly are," muttered Nick.

At the moment a policeman crossed the street from the other side of the avenue and demanded gruffly:

"Phat d' youse felleys want at that bank this toime o' night? Can't youse wait ter put yer money in till mornin'?"

"Maybe we're trying to get our cash out, Dolliver," remarked the electrician.

"Is ut you, sor? How are ye? I'd not heard there was a run on the bank. Sure, I thought ould Strusse had too much money."

Nick Carter started as he heard the name, and came down the steps.

"I've a question to ask you," he said.

"Well?"

"This is Mr. Carter, Dolliver," said the electrician.

"Glad ter know ye, Mr. Carter."

"Nick Carter, the detective," explained the electrician.

"Aw, begorra! is the bank afther bein' robbed?" cried the cop, startled, and curiously eying Nick.

"That we will discover later," said Nick crisply. "First we want the watchman. Do you know him?"

"Sure I do."

"Is he a special officer?"

"Sure he is not."

"Where would he be now?"

"Inside, by the same token he's supposed to stay there till six o'clock in th' marnin'."

"He's a faithful man?"

"He is thot!"

"I can't raise him."

"You've rung the bell, sor?"

"I have. Half a dozen times."

"In how long, sor?"

"Within five minutes."

"He'd heard you then an' come to the door."

"But he hasn't!"

"Then there's something the matter, sor!" cried the policeman.

"With the watchman?" demanded the electrician.

"With the bell, perhaps," said Nick Carter quietly. "It may be out of order."

"Not so likely, sor. I don't like th' looks of it," declared Dolliver.

"How do you suggest that we get into the bank?" asked Nick.

"Sure, I can call up th' station an' have th' sarge call th' nearest officer or director of the bank," said the cop, who evidently knew his business.

"Good! Tell the sergeant to make it an active officer—one who will have a key. Tell him I'm here."

"Yis, sor!" cried Dolliver, starting for the signal-box.

"And, officer!"

"Yis, sor?"

"Tell your sergeant to send for any official saving Mr. Strusse himself. He's president, isn't he?"

"Yis, sor."

"Don't have Mr. Strusse disturbed, Dolliver. There's no need of that," said Nick Carter quietly.

Had Patsy been there to hear this he would have pricked up his ears at Nick Carter's tone!

## CHAPTER III.

### GETTING INTO THE BANK.

The police signal-box was but a block away, and Dolliver was soon back on the corner. Meanwhile Nick Carter had punched the button again a dozen times; but there had been no response from the interior of the bank.

"Ain't Burnsie showed up?" queried the cop, with some anxiety.

"The watchman?" asked the superintendent of the power-and-light station.

"His name's Jim Burns—yis, sor," said Dolliver.

"Mr. Burns does not respond," replied Nick calmly.

"He's a good man," said the officer. "He never boozes, and he's not likely to sleep on duty. There's somethin' doin', ye may be sure, sor."

There was nothing the three could do at the moment but stand and look at each other, or stare up and down the wind and rain-driven street. It was near midnight, and the neighborhood was a very respectable one, and therefore lonely at this hour—especially on such a night.

The policeman occasionally said a low word to the electrician, usually about "Burnsie," whom he seemed to know well. The watchman had a wife and small family, and Dolliver hoped "nawt'in' had happened to th' poor gossoon."

Meanwhile the officer watched Nick Carter closely, as though he could not get his fill of the great detective's appearance. The latter's face was impassive; but as he stared along the quiet street he wondered what had so suddenly become of Patsy?

Following this line of thought, he quickly came to the frightened-looking man who had rushed up the area-steps near the center of the block and collided with him—the man with the umbrella and no hat.

"Ah!" muttered Nick. "There may be some good fishing there. And Patsy is nobody's fool! Did he see something in that fellow's appearance that set him to chasing him? Yet I swear the boy did not understand what was bringing us over here," and he glanced up at the bank-building.

"Humph! I did not even notice from which basement the man came. But if Patsy is following him, he will have noted the number. Well!"

It was with considerable confidence in the sharpness of his young assistant that the detective put the matter aside again when he saw a hack driving rapidly down the block.

"I reckon here would be the bank-officer?" suggested Dolliver.

"And I reckon you are right," admitted Nick Carter as the carriage halted at the curb. "Ah!" he added to himself. "Mr. James Aborn, the cashier."

Nick Carter was pretty familiar with every bank-official in Greater New York—at least, with the officers of those banks belonging to the American Bankers' Association. He knew this gentleman by sight, although Mr. Aborn evidently did not know the detective, as he rushed up to the electrician and cried:

"What's the matter, sir? I hear from the police-station that there is something the matter in the bank. You are Mr. Nicholas Carter?"

"This is Mr. Carter," said the electrician, waving his hand at the amused Nick.

"If you've a key to the bank door we'll go in and see, Mr. Aborn," said the detective.

"You have the advantage of me, Mr. Carter. I beg your pardon. I do not remember of meeting you before?" said the cashier, who was small, and round, and excitable, and bald-headed.

"Possibly not. But it is my business to know men in your position, Mr. Aborn," said Nick. "Besides—I know Mr. Strusse."

"Oh, indeed? Then it's all right if you know our president," declared Aborn, with much pride, for Burton Strusse was a big man to be at the head of such a small bank as the Fruiterers' Exchange!

"Now, can we get in?" suggested Nick, with admirable patience.

"Why not call the watchman?"

"He does not answer."

"Goodness! Burns is a faithful man. I am sure."

"Be th' powers, sor," interrupted Dolliver, who was

anxious. "I know Jimmy Burns. He's a good man. Be the same token, I believe he's fallen inter trouble in yon."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed James Aborn, and took out his bunch of keys.

While he fumbled to open the outer grillwork door of the banking-rooms, he asked Carter:

"What do you know about this, sir? Who called you into it? Can it be that the bank has been robbed?"

"Those questions are simply answered," returned the detective cheerfully. "I have no idea what has really happened here—if anything *has* happened. I am 'in it' quite by chance. And I have no reason for thinking the bank has been burglarized."

"No?" queried little Aborn eagerly.

"No," said Nick Carter, giving the cashier a queer look. "But there are more ways than one for a bank to lose money, sir."

"What do you mean?" demanded the cashier, startled and frowning, hesitating with another key in his hand—evidently the one that unlocked the inner door.

"Bad investments; unfortunate speculations; and—sometimes—dishonest men handling the funds."

Nick Carter said it all quite cheerfully.

"But, of course," he added, as he watched Aborn's stricken face, "with such a man as Mr. Strusse at the head of affairs——"

"By heavens, sir!" ejaculated Aborn. "I should say so! Why, Mr. Strusse's finger is on every part of the business. A clerk could not steal a postage stamp without the president's knowing it."

"So I would have sworn—knowing Mr. Strusse's methods as I do," agreed Nick Carter, with seeming enthusiasm likewise. "So I would have sworn!"

Mr. Aborn turned and unlocked the inner door.

"Stand here, Dolliver," commanded Nick Carter. "If your 'rounds' shows up you can send him inside. Have you a gun, sir?" he asked the electrician.

"No."

"And you, Mr. Aborn?"

"No, no! Then you *do* suspect burglars?"

"Better be prepared for anything," returned the detective.

"I know where two loaded revolvers are kept," said Aborn.

"Get those first, then!" advised the detective, taking out his own weapon as the trio stepped into the banking-rooms.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MAN ON THE STAIRS AND THE MAN ON THE ROOF.

There were four incandescent bulbs alight in the banking-rooms—one in front and the others at different positions inside the cage. One hung directly before the great doors of the vault; but the banking floor was so high up that the vault could not be seen easily from the street; and, besides, a painted screen, such as burglars use while cracking a safe, could easily shield a quartet of men at work upon the doors of the strong box.

However, a single glance at the face of the doors assured them all that nobody had tampered with the mechanism, and Aborn uttered a thankful ejaculation. He sang out for Jim Burns, the watchman.

"Burns! Burns! Are you there?" he shouted.

The electrician hastily interposed:

"You're warning anybody who might be here, Mr. Aborn," he said.

"Nonsense," said Nick. "If there's been a break attempted, the perpetrators are far off ere this. Lead away, Mr. Aborn. Where does Burns usually spend the night?"

"There is a time-lock here beside my desk," said Aborn, going into the enclosed space. "He is supposed to put in a check every hour."

"Look at it, sir," advised Nick.

"I'm going to."

"Can you tell when he was here last?"

"In a minute," returned the cashier, searching for another key.

In a little time he had opened the time-clock and taken out the indicator-card. It was punched within a few minutes of every hour from seven o'clock to eleven."

"And now it lacks ten minutes of one," said Carter quietly. "He is behind time, to say the least."

"Oh, there is something wrong—depend upon it!" cried Aborn. "Burns has always been faithful."

The cashier was plainly troubled for the watchman.

"Has he a couch anywhere on which he might have lain down?"

"There's one in the directors' room, and a cot in the basement, where there are brick vaults in which we store ledgers and less important documents."

Carter opened the door of the room in question and flashed his own hand-lamp about. It was empty and nothing was misplaced. The windows had not been opened. He looked, too, into the smaller offices.

"Let's look at the cellar, then," he said.

"But, Mr. Carter," whispered the electrician, "you saw that flash of light above the roof of this building——"

"Eh?" exclaimed the startled Aborn.

"Perhaps," returned Nick coolly. "Nevertheless, we'll look down cellar first. Begin at the bottom and work up, as it were," and he smiled quietly.

There was a way down to the basement from the banking-rooms, and Aborn pointed it out. The door was unlocked, and, Nick guiding them with his flash-light, the trio descended to the underground floor. Here were the heating-arrangements, the coal-bins, the brick vaults Aborn had spoken of, and in the corner a neat room par-

titioned off in which was an Army and Navy bed, and a blanket folded upon it.

There was a pipe upon a tray on the table, and Nick picked it up, found that there was considerable dottle left in it, and smelled it. The pipe was, of course, cold; but he was sure it had been smoked that night.

There was a magazine laid face downward on the table beside the pipe, held open evidently to an article the watchman had been reading. The neat way it was placed, with unruffled leaves, the pipe in the tray, and the general tidiness of the room, convinced Nick that the watchman had not been startled or surprised when he left the room.

He had put his check into the clock at ten. It looked very much to the detective as though the watchman had returned to his pipe and his magazine until it came about time to make his next round—at eleven o'clock. He had laid down the book and the dhudeen and gone calmly upstairs—taking his lamp with him.

"Unless he was brought down here again against his will," was Nick's quick decision, "he is still above—or has left the building entirely."

With this thought the detective walked swiftly from door to door, looked into each coal-bin, flashed his light into every corner where a man's body might be hidden, and finally turned to Aborn with the demand:

"Of course, Burns would have no way of getting into these four brick closets?"

"No, indeed!"

"They are good locks, I see. Who has the keys?"

"The keys are inside the big vault up-stairs—that is, all the keys that I know anything about. Mr. Strusse may have duplicates."

"Oh—ah—yes. Strusse, of course," muttered Nick Carter, and led the way out of the cellar without further words.

"Where does this door lead to?" the detective demanded, laying his hand on the knob of a heavy door next to the basement stairway, when they were once more in the banking-rooms.

"That is into the hall of the building."

"Oh, yes! there is another street-door on the avenue?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter. The bank has offices to lease overhead. Burns took a trip through the halls every hour, as well as through this part of the building."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nick Carter. "Here comes Rounds. Good morning, Rounds. I see you know me?"

"Yes, sir," said the officer, who had just come in at the front entrance.

"Have you an extra man within call?"

"I can get one in a minute."

Nick had stepped into the hall and was examining the lock of the street-door.

"Call him in and put him in this hall while we look about up-stairs. Of course, you'll leave Dolliver out there?"

"Certainly, sir. Shall I send to the station for anybody else?"

"No need to stir up a row until we know just what has happened," replied Carter. "Come, gentlemen, we will go up-stairs now."

The banking-rooms themselves were very high ceiled, and there were two stories above. The building was quite as high as any other house on the block. This was an old-fashioned quarter of the town, and the tall tenement, or flat-house, had not encroached on the old-fashioned brownstone front and brick dwellings.

"Come up-stairs when you find your man, Rounds," advised the detective, from half-way up the flight.

"All right, sir," responded the roundsman, who hurried through the banking-rooms to the street.

Nick Carter moved rapidly, but with no appearance of excitement, whereas Aborn and the electrician were plainly much shaken by the circumstances and by the expectation of what might be in store for them.

"All these offices occupied?" was Nick's first question when he reached the second floor.

"Yes," replied Aborn, puffing up behind him.

"Who uses them? Ah! here's a directory."

His light had shown him the marble slab screwed to the wall. Aborn reached for a gas-jet and applied a match. The names were displayed more plainly in its radiance.

Carter's forefinger ran down the list rapidly. There was the name of a law firm that did a good deal of business in a neighboring court; there were real-estate brokers, a fashionable dentist, and several other firms. Some of the names the detective knew.

"All these people are still here?"

"Why, in the daytime, of course," said Aborn.

"No new tenants lately?"

"No, indeed!"

"Try all those doors," Nick said briefly to the electrician, starting for the stairway leading to the next floor. "And when Rounds comes back let him remain on this floor and you follow us."

The superintendent of the district power-house, like the bank cashier and the police officers, fell into an obedient attitude when Nick Carter spoke. The latter bounded up these stairs, and little Aborn puffed along in his rear, mopping his head with his handkerchief.

The doors on the third floor were all tightly closed, too. There was one at the end of the hall, toward the rear of the building, that attracted Nick's attention. There were none below located like it.

"What's that, Mr. Aborn?" he demanded, pointing to this door.

"That goes to the roof, sir."

"A stairway, of course?"

"Yes, sir. But with a hatch that is well bolted."

"All right."

"It would be hardly possible for anybody to get in from the roof——"

He halted—and with a gasp that showed horror, as well as did the look that suddenly came into his face. He, and Nick Carter, too, had seen the same thing at the same time.

From under the door of the stairway leading to the roof trickled a thin stream of dark, sticky liquid.

"Blood!" whispered Aborn.

Nick Carter strode forward and opened the door just as the electrician came up the stairs from the second floor.

Out upon the tiled floor rolled the body of a man—an awful, wabbly heap of dead flesh and blood-stained clothing!

"Burns!" yelled Aborn hysterically.

The watchman had been shot through the head, his face was a mask of blood, and up the stairs they could see the remains of his shattered lantern.

The cashier went to pieces and actually sobbed aloud. But the electrician was made of firmer stuff.

"Those fellows have got away—whoever they are, Mr. Carter?" he suggested, eying the dead man calmly. "They did for him and flung him up that stairway, eh?"

"No," returned the detective briefly.

"Why—then——"

"The first shot shattered the lantern. The watchman was almost to the roof."

"Ah!" cried the electrician.

"The bolts are drawn—or sawn through," added Nick Carter. "Burns ran up here, hearing them at the hatch, and started up this stair. They shot him, and he fell. One of the scoundrels came down far enough to shut the door, and then went back to the roof and——"

"Escaped, of course!" cried Aborn. "Oh, it's dastardly! dastardly! The poor fellow!"

"Crying won't bring him back to life," muttered Carter. "No need in watching these offices. The burglars have escaped—if they were burglars," he added softly.

Then aloud he said:

"Mr. Aborn, call up the roundsman. We have discovered enough to warrant the police and coroner being notified. Perhaps you would go down and telephone, yourself, in the bank?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Carter!" gasped the cashier, stumbling to the stairhead and wiping his eyes.

Nick wanted to get him out of the way. There wasn't much comfort in having the cashier around, moaning over the dead Burns.

The latter Nick had laid out decently, with his hands crossed on his breast, and he had covered the poor man's face with his own handkerchief.

"Come on," the detective said again to the electrician. "None of this explains what we came here to—er—find."

"I see that, Mr. Carter."

"There may be something worse than all this on the roof."

"Well, I've stomach for it," grumbled the superintendent of the power-house. "Linemen have to see many a bad mess."

Nick Carter went upward, stepping carefully so as not to get into either the blood or the broken glass. The hatch was drawn over the opening to the roof, but the bolts were sawn asunder. Nick flung the cover aside and instantly the rain and wind beat in upon their upturned faces.

"Nasty night, don't you know," murmured the electrician.

Nick Carter chuckled.

"You've got good nerves of your own, young man," he remarked. "Now, come up here and we'll see what—we—shall—see!"

As he spoke he darted the rays of his hand-lamp about the wet roof. There was a huge chimney and a vent-pipe or two near at hand. They cast a darker shadow upon the gravel.

"Ah!" muttered the electrician.

Something moved at one side. Nick flashed his light at it. It was a loose wire swinging in a gust of wind.

"You're going to find your break, young man," said the detective.

The electrician was looking in the deeper shadow of

the chimney, however. He strode quickly forward and called to Nick.

"Here it is, sir!" he said, with a sudden hush in his tone.

The detective came quickly. He flashed his light upon the heap of *something* that lay there. He sniffed the air, too. There was the odor of singed cloth and scorched flesh lingering in the air.

"Dead as the other!" exclaimed the electrician, going down on one knee and handling the shapeless mass.

He straightened it out. It was a man, of course. Part of his clothing was burned from him. There was a broad, livid mark across his bared breast. Shreds of scorched linen and cloth hid part of this mark.

Near-by lay a tall hat—an opera, crush-hat. A single glove that had once been white likewise lay on the roof. The man, in fact, had been in evening dress.

"Strange get-up for a burglar, Mr. Carter?" the electrician ventured to remark.

Meanwhile he was turning over the body of the man. Nick did not speak. He flashed his light into the upturned features—so white, so drawn, with eyes staring in horror into his own.

Suddenly there was a shriek behind them that startled both of the discoverers of this gruesome body. James Aborn had come up again and was shivering and gibbering in the hatchway. The ray of Nick's lamp had revealed the face of the dead man on the roof to the cashier, as well.

"Mr. Daggett! Great heavens! It is Mr. Strusse's nephew, Ben Daggett!" the white-lipped Aborn said.

## CHAPTER V.

### A CLEAR STATEMENT OF THE CASE.

When the directors of a bank meet in their room in that institution as early as seven-thirty in the morning, one may easily believe that there is grave reason for it.

Nick Carter, fresh from his bath and rub-down at Joseph's hands, entered the directors' room of the Fruiterer's Exchange Bank, at just that hour, and found present five of the directors, Aborn, the cashier; McQuillan, the vice-president; and John Bloodgood, the teller. These men Aborn had been able to get together at this hour because Nick had urged it.

The detective looked at the vacant chair at the head of the table, and his glance was significant.

"Mr. Strusse, of course, is in no shape to come here to-day, Mr. Carter," said the cashier nervously. "The shock to him—one of his family, as you might say—— Why, it was awful when I took the news to him!"

"He was very much moved, was he?" queried the detective.

"He was, indeed."

"Perhaps Mr. Strusse is anxious about his private accounts, too," said McQuillan. "That Daggett was his principal man of business."

"But you don't really think there's anything wrong with *your* accounts, do you, Mr. McQuillan?" queried the nervous Aborn.

"I reckon not. Ben Daggett never dabbled much in this bank. I remembered his father. I wouldn't have stood for it—even if Mr. Strusse had insisted."

McQuillan was a pompous donkey. Nick Carter sized him up for that at the start.

"Well, gentlemen," interposed Nick Carter, "that phase of the matter is your own affair. I am here for another purpose. I told Mr. Aborn that if he would gather you together I would, by this time, have at least a working-theory of the matter as it stands.

"Whether or no your accounts are straight has nothing to do with the case. This was a plain and *not* simple break—evidently a well-planned attempt to crack your vault. Was there much in it?"

"Why," said Aborn, "as I told you this morning, Mr. Carter, we had not had so much ready cash on hand for months."

"That proves quite conclusively, then, that somebody in the game was familiar with the bank and its workings."

"I should think the finding of Daggett was enough to prove that," grumbled McQuillan.

"I always prefer contributory evidence, sir," said Nick sweetly.

"Well, who did it? That's more important," said Bloodgood, the teller.

"And have you caught them yet?" added the grouty McQuillan.

"All in good time, gentlemen. I have, naturally, not come to tell you the case is complete. You belong to the A. B. A. You have your own detectives to run these burglars down. I told Aborn I would try to explain the method of this attempt. Outside of that I assure you I have no interest—at present."

"Well, I suppose there must have been a gang of them?" queried McQuillan.

"Perhaps not more than two or three," returned the detective.

"Two men to attempt cracking a bank?" cried another of the directors.

"*And* the man inside."

"What man?" gasped Aborn. "Not poor Burns?".

"Hardly. Burns was a victim. They did not expect to have to kill him; but they shot him ruthlessly when the need arose. They tried another way of putting him aside, however. And that is why I say there was a man on the inside of this job."

"You mean, Mr. Carter," said Bloodgood, in a shaking voice, "that some employee of this bank was a member of the gang that tried to rob us?"

"I mean that somebody who knew the bank well, and knew Burns likewise, was an accomplice before the fact—and might even be an active member of the gang that attempted the break."

"Come, come!" cried McQuillan. "This is mere assertion. Prove it."

"I will endeavor to do so," returned the detective quietly.

He did not like the vice-president much more than he did Strusse himself; but McQuillan could not ruffle him.

"As I have pointed out, it is probable that the break was planned for some time. The burglars waited until they could make a good haul if they succeeded in opening the vault doors. And they began early enough in the evening to make that a promising fact."

"How do you know?" asked one of the directors.

"We will come to that. All in good time," remarked Nick Carter. "Here is something that I picked up down cellar when I went there to look for Burns, with Mr. Aborn."

He brought forth from his pocket a flask half-filled with liquor.

"Whisky!" ejaculated McQuillan. "I thought you swore Burns didn't drink, Aborn?"

"I'll swear he did not make a practise of doing so on duty," declared the little cashier, with some warmth.

"Half of that stuff's gone. Who drank it?" snapped McQuillan.

"Nobody has drunk the missing portion," said Carter quietly. "I have an assistant who is something of an analytical chemist: he has analyzed a sample of this liquor and finds it drugged. I have sent a sample, too, to one of the best-known chemists in New York—under seal. I feel sure that his report will bear out Chick's finding."

"Then somebody tried to drug the watchman?" cried Bloodgood, the teller.

"That is the way it looks. A policeman friend of Burns tells me that the watchman used to be a heavy drinker. He was one of those unfortunate men who could not take a drink and then let the stuff alone. His only safety was in avoiding it altogether.

"For five years and more Burns kept the pledge. But somebody gave him this flask, while he was in the bank, or was going to the bank, and he took it with him into the cellar. It was hoped that he would be tempted to swallow some of it."

"He didn't, then?" cried Aborn.

"The cork had not been drawn," declared the detective. "Your watchman was a perfectly trustworthy man, and lost his life in seeking to protect the bank."

"Well, well!" snapped McQuillan. "You seem to be long-winded, Mr. Carter."

Nick ignored him, but went on placidly:

"This whisky, of course, was put into Burns' hands last night, or was left where he would find it last night. It might have even been put on that little table down in his cubby-hole in the cellar——"

"By somebody working in the bank daytimes?" gasped Bloodgood, who was as excitable as Aborn.

"Just so," admitted Nick.

"I don't believe it!" growled McQuillan. "We haven't a new man working on the bank force. The clerk who has been with us the shortest is Blanding, and he's three years in the bank, at that!"

"We won't go into the matter of the identity of these men just now," said Nick Carter patiently. "It is more important to see what they did."

"Well, Mr. Carter, what did they do?" queried a director pleasantly.

"One of them attended to the tempting of the watchman. If Burns had taken a good sup of that he would have been dead to the world for the rest of the night. The drug used is powerful, and is not locally known. It comes from South America, and is not even well known there, I believe. Is an Indian drug, in fact."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Bloodgood. "Why, we have no dealings with such people. There is nobody on our

force who ever has been to South America—that I know of."

"It is a point I make for future reference," said Nick, smiling at the teller. "It may lead in the end to the identifying of one or more of the burglars. But it has nothing to do with the present subject—of what they did.

"The watchman was attended to—or so they hoped. If he drank the whisky—or some of it—well and good. If not, they were, of course, prepared to settle him as they did."

"The devils!" murmured Aborn, wiping his eyes. "Poor Burns!"

McQuillan snorted, but said nothing.

"The burglars," continued Nick Carter, "had arranged in some way to reach the roof of your building. We shall probably discover that one or more of them hired a room in one of these lodging-houses along the row here, and probably a top-floor room. It would be an easy matter for them to reach the roof of the house in which they secured this lodging, and from thence cross the intervening roofs and drop down upon that of the bank.

"They were up there last night, probably soon after ten. They began work as soon as Burns had made his ten-o'clock round and gone back to the cellar. It was no small job to get through that hatch. It was almost as difficult as getting into the vault itself when they had once gotten below here."

"You seem to think they could have done that very easily, Mr. Carter?" broke in the vice-president, with a well-defined sneer.

"Quite easily, Mr. McQuillan," returned Nick composedly.

"Bah! That vault——"

"That vault is a modern safe, with modern locks. But electricity will do wonders. They were prepared to bring I don't know how many volts to bear upon the metal around the locks of the vault door. The "needle," as it is called, the coils of wire, the painted screen to shield them from the street, and all the other paraphernalia, were found by me on the roof; as well as a most complete set of burglars' tools.

"Two or three men might have made the break; but they were armed with two thousand dollars' worth of tools and paraphernalia, and the weight of the things must have risen eight hundred pounds!"

"For pity's sake!" gasped Bloodgood. "All that?"

"They could never have got the stuff away," said one of the directors.

"They wouldn't have cared—had the break been successful," smiled Nick Carter. "A more complete outfit I have seldom seen. That is why I am confident the cracksmen were sure that to-night the vault would contain a great deal of ready cash. They would have taken few risks with such an outfit."

"And where would they get the electric power?" demanded McQuillan.

"From a power-cable that crosses your roof."

"But if they tampered with that the lights would go out and then the policemen on the beat would have known something was wrong."

"That very fact proves that the burglars had the most intimate knowledge of the bank and its arrangements. As it happens, the bank was built before there was a power and lighting plant in this district. Your light comes from an old wire and through an old conduit from a plant farther up-town. The burglars knew that.

"Tapping this wire that crosses your roof might have made trouble elsewhere, but not here. At it chanced, tapping the wire did more than that. It killed——"

"Ben Daggett!" growled McQuillan, breaking in again.

"Oh! then Mr. Daggett was not killed by Burns?" exclaimed a director.

"No," said Nick Carter. "Daggett was killed by a powerful shock of electricity. The wire was broken, or cut, by accident. It must have fallen across his chest and he short-circuited it. He was killed instantly, and would have been incinerated had not the wire writhed off him. Then the power was shut off when they learned of the break at the power-house.

"Meanwhile Burns had heard, or seen, something, and he dashed up to the roof. When he ran up that upper ladder he was met by one of the burglars, who shot him dead. Then the remaining members of the gang—we do not know just how many there were—escaped. The cut wire, the flash, the dead man on the roof and the dead man on the stair, were too much for the scoundrels.

"This is the simple statement of what probably happened, gentlemen. It is all I have to say. You can call in your Pinkerton men and search for the perpetrators of the crime. I think that my duty ends right here, gentlemen. I bid you good morning," and the detective took up his hat and left the directors' room and likewise the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RUSTLE OF A SKIRT.

Nick Carter returned home directly from his interview with the directors of the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank, and his first act upon entering his den at the back of the house was to touch the bell for Joseph, his valet. The quiet, faithful serving-man was as promptly at the door as usual.

"You rang, sir?"

"Yes, Joseph. Any callers?"

"One, sir."

"Did the person wait?"

"No, sir."

"H'm! Did you know the party?"

"No, sir."

"Man or woman?"

"A lady, sir," said Joseph, with an emphatic distinction.

"Indeed?" exclaimed Nick Carter, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir."

"Anything of importance?"

"She would not say, sir. But I thought it was of moment."

"You thought so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"By her manner, Mr. Carter."

"Explain yourself, Joseph."

"She was well dressed, heavily veiled, and was weeping."

"Yes? Three precursors of trouble, I do believe, Joseph," admitted Nick Carter, with a faint smile.

"And then, she called so early, sir."

"Good. You are observant. But you did not learn if——"

"I sent Danny after her when she would not wait?" said Joseph tentatively.

"Right, Joseph! And Patsy? Has he showed up?"

"He has not slept in his bed, sir."

"Then he is not returned, of course."

"No, sir."

"The moment he returns let him come up. And, Joseph!"

"Yes, sir?"

"When Danny comes back send him up, too. Is the woman coming again?"

"She did not say, sir."

"Well, let me see Danny, anyway."

All sorts and conditions of persons called upon Nick Carter, to ask his advice, or to report upon real or suspected crimes; but a well-dressed woman, who was moved to tears, was not so common on the detective's calling-list. Nevertheless, the rustle of a skirt did not interest Nick Carter as it would have his youthful assistant, Patsy Garvan.

"If Patsy had been here she'd never have got away without telling something of her business to him," thought Nick, with a chuckle.

However, Nick's mind lingered but briefly on the mystery of the woman who had called—as to who she might be, and what she might want of him.

He had bowed himself out of the directors' meeting in a manner, and with the words, to give those gentlemen there assembled to understand that he was finished with the business of the attempt upon the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank. But that was far from the case.

He had determined that, if it were offered him, he would not take the job of running down the perpetrators of that criminal attempt—at least openly. The bank was a member of the American Bankers' Association, which was an arrangement originated between bankers by the late Robert Pinkerton, and all breaks in institutions belonging to the association were usually handled by Pinkerton men.

It was not up to Nick Carter to butt into the game. He seldom worked with the Pinkertons, for the latter-day methods of that great agency did not appeal to him.

The finding of the nephew of Burton Strusse dead upon the roof of the bank, however, was a circumstance that had determined Nick to have a "look in" on the game for his own personal reasons. He knew Strusse of old. As before related, he had caught the millionaire in a very reprehensible conspiracy against his ward, Sallie O'Neil—or against her peace of mind. And of late he had been the means of making the wood pulp magnate pay dearly for some of his own son's peccadilloes.

It looked to Nick as though Strusse and his immediate family were all tarred with the same brush. Nick had received from Cleveland Parr, Mr. Strusse's secretary, excellent reports regarding Ben Daggett, the son of Strusse's dead sister; and in Parr Nick had every confi-

dence. But the last night's happening seemed to disprove all Parr had declared regarding Daggett's character, and to bear out indeed what was publicly known about Daggett's father.

Strusse's brother-in-law, young Daggett's father, had committed suicide after the wrecking of the North Side Mechanics' Bank, some years before. Yet Strusse himself had brought young Ben up and placed him in confidential positions. It was a mystery.

Nick Carter rose from his seat, tossed his half-consumed cigar away, and walked to his file-cabinet and opened the drawer marked "S. R." He selected the card he wanted and reflectively read it:

"Strusse, Burton. Bn Stutgart, Ger., Apr. 12, 1852; of Eng. & Ger. parents; emigrated with parents in '61; com. sch. ed.; no trade; imp. furs, diamonds, wh'ls'le groceries till '78; mines—esp. early coppers; rated mil. '98; in '07 finance & banking; Wood Pulp Trst.

"Nth. Side Mech. Bk. in '81; director; A. B. Daggett, brother-in-law, found shot through head in cashier's office—own hand; bad Ins. & misap'ns $112,000. Courts would not hold directors. S. settled bank's default in full nine months following wreck. *Why?*"

There had been recently added a single line under that emphasized question, *"why?"* This line was the culmination of certain discoveries that Nick Carter had made since his dealings began with Mr. Burton Strusse. And, oddly enough, it dealt with Ben Daggett—in a way.

It read:

"Mrs. D. refused to live with S. after D.'s death, or accept provision."

And following this was another bold *"why?"*

The detective read his memorandum through, shook his head, returned the card to the drawer, and closed it just as Joseph tapped at the door.

"Well?" queried his master, as the valet looked in.

"The report from the chemist, sir," said Joseph, placing a sealed letter in the detective's palm.

"He'll uphold Chick's analysis, I bet!" muttered Nick, who had confidence in his assistant.

Yet he opened the envelope with some interest.

Beneath the briefly stated contents of the desk which had been put into the famous chemist's hands, was this note:

"Queer drug to turn up in civilization—and in New York. It is only known among the 'blowpipe' tribes of the Amazon country. They use it to tip their arrows with. It is a paralyzing poison when taken into the system through the veins; but acts as a powerful narcotic when taken into the stomach."

"I reckoned Chick had made no mistake," repeated Nick Carter. "And it *is* an odd thing that the drug should have found its way to New York to be used by a burglar—or the confederate of a burglar."

Joseph came back again in a moment.

"Well?" asked Nick Carter.

"Danny has returned, sir."

"Send him up," said the detective.

Danny, the chauffeur, was directly behind the valet, and he stepped into the room quickly.

"You followed that lady?" queried Nick.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you discover her name and where she lived?"

"I did, sir."

The young fellow came forward as he spoke and laid a slip of paper before the detective.

"Her name I got from a cabman, sir, and I followed her to her home."

But Nick Carter was not listening. He had glanced at the lines written on the paper in Danny's sprawling hand. Now his lips puckered, and he emitted from them a long whistle.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "The rustle of a skirt, sure enough!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### PATSY PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT.

Patsy Garvan had been deeply puzzled by Nick Carter's strange interest in the electric flash he had seen over the roofs of the building when the break in that particular electric circuit occurred; but, to tell the truth, he was even more deeply interested in the idea of getting home, changing his wet clothing, and tumbling into bed.

As he had followed along the half-lighted street behind Nick and the superintendent of the power-station, he secretly cursed his chief's curiosity.

"We ain't got no call to butt into this thing," thought Patsy, with a good deal more of a grouch on than he usually indulged in. "There warn't no 'call of the wild' that I could hear! I'd a blamed sight rather hustle home and pound me ear!"

He kept well up with Nick and the electrician, however, until they came to the middle of the block on which

the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank stood. Then suddenly he saw Nick dodge a man who had just rushed out of the area of one of the houses.

The man came on almost blindly. Patsy caught a glimpse of his face, and in a flash he became a different sort of a looking boy!

The change which came over young Garvan was marvelous. Talk about the vaudeville lightning-change artist! Those lads aren't in it to the marvelous quickness of Patsy on this occasion.

As Nick dodged the charging stranger, Patsy had caught a glimpse of his white face. The man was hatless, but he carried an umbrella. He looked scared, and it is doubtful if he really noticed Nick Carter when he bumped into him.

That did not prove that he wouldn't see and recognize Patsy, however, and on the instant Patsy knew *him!* The detective's assistant had been walking briskly after his chief, sheltered well from the beating storm by his umbrella.

Now he turned as though on a pivot and pressed against the umbrella, walking in exactly the opposite way—the way the stranger was hurrying—as though all the time he had been aimed in that direction, but, perhaps, had halted a moment to rest.

Instead of the straight and rather handsome Patsy Garvan, too, the young man had marvelously changed his appearance. He walked with a limp, as though his right leg was shorter than the other, and his shoulder was thrust awkwardly up to his ear, too. He had given his cap a yank over his eyes, and a twist of his features all to the right gave Patsy the appearance of a man who had been attacked by incipient paralysis, which had twisted the whole right side of his body!

He was, indeed, a distressing-looking object when the hatless man overtook him and pushed roughly by. If this individual had looked keenly at Patsy he would never have known him in the world! Patsy could not have continued this freak performance for long, but it would have amply served his purpose had the frightened man glanced in his direction.

However, the fellow rushed by, staring straight ahead, and it is doubtful if he even saw Patsy. The latter, however, had studied him in that moment very closely. His first opinion was borne out. The man under the umbrella was running away from something that had frightened him terribly.

Something had startled Nick Carter and had set him upon a trail that Patsy could not understand. But the appearance of this frightened man was sufficient to awake young Garvan to the idea that "there was something doing."

"It would take considerable to frighten that guy, and he's scared for fair," was Patsy's decision. "Whether it's what Nick has got by the tail or not, mebbe I'd better look into it."

He glanced up at the house he was passing, and figured back quickly to the number of the one the frightened man had come out of, and made a note of *that* number for future reference.

"That guy's so scared that he didn't stop for his hat, that's sure," muttered Patsy. "He grabbed that umbrella as he was running out of the house. I bet it ain't even his. Huh! is it murder, or arson, or did somebody chase him?"

Patsy hobbled along behind the hurrying figure of the man he was following. The fellow kept on west, did not reduce his stride, and soon Patsy found that he was in danger of being left too far behind.

To keep up his character of a cripple, he had to hobble slowly.

"There's got to be a change on the face of the moon," muttered Nick Carter's bright assistant. "This won't do at all. Besides, me face aches."

He looked about for some shadowy place, where he might find shelter for a minute or two, and meanwhile almost ran to overtake the frightened man.

At length he spied an open gateway between two houses across the street. It was the entrance to a covered alley leading back to a stable-yard. For some reason the gate had been left open.

Patsy asked no better place. It was out of the rain, and he could drop his umbrella and use both hands.

He hobbled over the street and darted into this shadowy place. Nobody interfered with him, and, although it was pitch-dark, he made his changes perfectly. Practise in all such games had made Patsy well-nigh perfect.

It would certainly have been difficult to have recognized in the individual who came forth from the alley, the half-paralyzed cripple who had darted into it two minutes before!

Patsy had turned his coat inside out, had flung away his cap and taken a slouch-hat from his pocket. He wore eye-glasses, a black wig, and a little whisp of black

mustache, very much waxed at the points, with a pointed goatee to match.

He looked like a little Frenchman—a musician, or something of the kind—and he minced along the street after the now distant hatless man in a way that quickly carried him over the ground and enabled him to overtake his quarry within two blocks.

Fortune was on Patsy's side, too. His make-up fitted exactly with the neighborhood to which the hatless man led him. Perhaps the astute young detective had suspected his quarry's destination, anyway.

They came into the mixed French quarter, west of Sixth Avenue and south of Thirty-fourth Street, and there Patsy's disguise "went great," as he himself expressed it.

The man he was following, however, showed considerable ingenuity in passing cops on the opposite side of the thoroughfare here, and tipping his umbrella so as to hide the fact that he was bareheaded. It was evident that he had somewhat recovered from his fright, and was cautious enough to wish no question asked him by the authorities regarding his missing head-gear.

He could not dodge Patsy, however. That young man kept close in his wake, being pretty sure now as to the man's destination.

The terminal facilities are changing this section of the town mightily. On every side old buildings are coming down and excavations being made. Some buildings stand alone, with ruins about them, while owners try to force tenants on lease to accept small damages and get out. Some half-ruined houses are tenanted up to the very day the walls are to be torn down. The families scarcely get their household stuff upon the vans before the wreckers begin flinging down the bricks and copings.

Upon one of these side streets, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, there was a big, double-decker tenement that had stood out alone for some weeks. The property was in the courts, and the wrecking-company had been enjoined from continuing the destruction of the house which had, in fact, already been begun. One end wall was half-down, but the other side of the double-decker housed several tenants, who held their places under nominal weekly rentals.

The hatless man hurried toward this house, and, from the opposite side of the street, the disguised Patsy saw him enter. He ran into the entrance to the half-ruined part of the house, and this puzzled Patsy vastly.

The upper part of that side of the building was open to the airs of heaven—and just now to the rain and sleet. It could not offer a luxurious hiding-place for anybody.

"Say! is this duck a blind?" murmured Patsy. "What's the chance of a getaway from the rear of this ranch?"

He went around to an opening in a high fence and discovered very quickly that the house stood on the edge of a cliff. A deep pit had already been dug behind it. There could be no escape in that direction. The man he was following must still be in the house.

In a neighboring pit there were drills at work, even in this rain-storm, and out toward the river trains were puffing in from the tunnel and running back and forth over the floor of the vast excavation which, in time, would be the site of the new Pennsylvania station and the freight-yards.

Patsy came boldly to the front of the house, looked up and down the walk and at the blank-looking windows, and then darted into the structure himself. His quarry had sought the half-ruined side of the double-decker tenement; he did the same.

"If there are folks living here, they must be on the lower floor," thought Patsy. "Now, here is where I've got to butt in and raise folks at an unseemly hour."

He was bound to locate his man, and time was pressing. If the fellow had merely used this house as a way of escape to some other, Patsy wanted to know it as soon as possible.

The hallway was absolutely dark. He reckoned that the gas had been cut off in this half of the house, anyway. There was a light under the door at the rear, on the first floor, and Patsy smelled a smoky kerosene-lamp. He pulled himself together, felt that his dinky little mustache and whiskers were on straight, and so approached and rapped upon this door.

There was absolute silence behind this door for a minute, while Patsy listened breathlessly. The lamplight still streamed out under the warped door, and not a whisper betrayed the presence of anybody within.

This door was behind the front stairway and was set in a partition facing the other half of the big tenement-house. The partition was not the main wall between the houses, Patsy knew; he was sure, however, that the room behind it must be narrow. The door might, indeed, lead into another hall.

Finally he thought he heard another door, beyond the

one at which he was listening, unlatched. More silence. Then Patsy risked rapping again.

Instantly a quavering voice—whether a man or woman's he could not tell, asked:

"Who is there?"

It sounded hollow and distant; but Patsy knew it was addressed to him. He held his tongue—and his breath—and rapped again.

"What do you want?" quavered the voice. "Why don't you come in?"

At this Patsy softly tried the knob of the door at which he had been rapping. He had not thought to try it before. It turned easily, and the door swung toward him.

"Come in!" exclaimed the voice more sharply.

Patsy had been standing in the dark so long that his eyes were dazzled by the full blaze of the lamp that seemed to hang directly before him. He pulled the door open widely enough to enter, and would have stepped in had he not heard some sound behind him.

The cautious sound—a footstep, he thought—startled him. He half-wheeled to see if he was followed, and instantly a heavy blow descended upon his cranium, pitching him forward and downward. The lamp went out, leaving the place into which he plunged pitch-dark, and instead of his coming to his knees on the floor of an inner apartment, the young fellow found himself falling through space!

There was no floor to the place into which he had been knocked. His hands, spread before him to break his fall, clutched an instant at the edge of the trap or shaft.

Down he fell, feet first, into a hole, the depth of which he only knew when he reached its bottom!

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A CLIMB TO LUCK.

Luckily that bottom was not very far!

Patsy's clutching the opposite edge of the open flooring had broken his fall so that when he landed upon his feet his body was only jarred.

So quickly does the mind act, however, that in the few seconds it took the young detective to reach the bottom of the shaft, he had decided upon a plan of action.

He knew that he had mistaken the door of the dumb-waiter well for the entrance to a room. One dumb-waiter, it was likely, had been used by both halves of the big tenement-house. And it had been a generous-sized one, with full-length doors on this first floor so that barrels, or heavy goods, could be gotten easily aboard for elevation to the flats above.

Another thought had been called upon this discovery, too. Patsy realized that he had been pitched headlong down the shaft. Only by chance had he saved himself from serious injury.

The quavering voice had fooled him into opening the door. A second person had crept behind and dealt him a savage blow which knocked him down the shaft. The lamp had been extinguished on the instant to aid in his overthrow.

His enemies—whoever they might be—desired his death, or injury. If they learned that he was not much hurt, they might come down and finish what they had begun!

Patsy was not anxious for a fight with them—not just then. He was badly shaken, for although the fall had not been more than ten feet to the bottom of the shaft, it was quite enough!

Patsy crumpled up, uttered a heartrending groan, and fell in a heap upon the ground! There he lay, hiding his face, but with an eye open, peering upward. If they left him alone he determined to "play dead" as long as it seemed advisable.

He heard whispering voices above, and then suddenly the ray of a dark lantern was shot into the hole. This revealed that his surmise had been right; he had fallen down the dumb-waiter shaft, and the elevator itself, and the ropes and other machinery, had already been removed.

"He's done for!" whined a voice above.

Patsy held his breath. A gruffer voice muttered something. Then the light was shut off, he heard two doors shut, one after the other, and he was left in the pitch-darkness of the place.

But for some minutes he dared not move, for it might be just a testing-time. He listened to discover if there was any sound above, or any footstep in the cellar beyond the door of the shaft, against which he lay huddled up like a bag of broken bones.

By and by he ventured to move from his cramped position. Slowly he gained his knees and listened. There was no sound from above; no noise from the cellar.

Evidently his enemies had been satisfied with that fervid groan he had uttered. It certainly had expressed

terrible agony, and they might well believe that he was seriously, if not fatally, injured.

If they left him alone here, and he was found alive or dead, it would be plain that he had wandered into the abandoned house and fallen down the shaft.

For Patsy was confident now that this side of the old house *was* abandoned. The man he had followed had stolen into this doorway for the purpose of watching if he was shadowed, before venturing into the inhabited part of the house. He had seen Patsy lingering about, and feared a trap.

Therefore he had laid a counter-ambush, had in some way communicated with a pal in the other side of the building, and the two had got Patsy in this hole.

"And they've done me good and plenty!" thought the disgusted young man. "I needn't have been so fresh. Mebbe they don't know who I am, or what I'm after; but they were not taking chances with anybody nosing about here.

"Now," pursued Patsy, "for getting out! Ain't there a handle to this blamed door?"

He had been feeling all over the place for such a protuberance. Suddenly he was smitten with a fuller appreciation of where he was and what kind of a door he was trying to open.

"Oh, splash!" ejaculated Patsy, in disgust. "Ain't I the soft-boiled myself, though? Why, there ain't no handle to this door on this side—of course there ain't! These doors only open from the outside."

It was a pretty pickle to get into! Unless he yelled for help, and probably brought his enemies first, how was he to obtain his freedom?

"It doesn't look as though I'd take breakfast at my usual hour," muttered Patsy. "That's sure. What a kettle of fish!"

He rattled the door softly. Then he felt around the frame again. Instead of the frame and the door being of wood, he discovered that both were of iron. He had a strong pocket-knife; but a knife would not cut his way to freedom through sheet-iron!

He placed his knee against the lock and tried to force the door open. But he was not as heavy as Nick Carter, or Chick, and it is doubtful if either of them could have accomplished this thing that he tried. Driving the screws from a wooden door-frame is a good deal different from forcing open an iron door, the fastenings of which are riveted into place.

No, Patsy was a prisoner at the bottom of this shaft, and it looked at the moment as though he was likely to stay there until morning. After daylight he might safely shout for assistance, and so get out. But he feared those who had helped him into his predicament at present.

Feeling at last that his prison was too secure for him to immediately release himself, Patsy fell back, leaned against the opposite door—for, of course, there were two at the bottom here—and put on his thinking-cap.

It was easy to see—or, rather, to "feel"—that the ropes, pulleys, and platform of the dumb-waiter had been removed. Had the ropes only hung in place Patsy would have climbed up hand over hand.

Yet the thought started his mind on another train. He was not willing to stay here without some attempt at escape.

He had heard no sound from above since the people who had helped him down here had shut the doors and gone away. They might even be out of the house by this time; yet Patsy doubted if that were so.

The man he had followed lived somewhere in this vicinity, he was sure. And this tumble-down wreck of a house would be an ideal place in which such people might hide.

He had plainly been very familiar with the condition of the house, too. Otherwise he would not have tolled Patsy so easily into this trap.

"And that's where I am—in a trap," muttered young Garvan. "I'm like a rat in a cage. Well, by Jove! we'll see if the rat can't gnaw his way out!"

There was no use in wearing out his teeth on these iron doors, however. If there was escape for him at all, without the help of outsiders, it lay above. That fact Patsy well knew.

Turning his face upward, he could not see any light from the first-floor level now. That lamp that had led him into difficulty had not been relighted. Far, far above—he could not tell how many floors up—there was a faint lightening of the gloom. But here at the bottom the darkness was thick indeed!

Patsy drew forth his match-box and scratched a wax taper. It sputtered into flame and cast a warm, yellow glow about the bottom of the pocket in which he stood.

He could see all about him and up some six or seven feet. The wax match burned fully a minute, and a minute is sixty seconds, and gives one a chance to do a good deal of looking, as well as thinking!

The dumb-waiter had been a generous one, as before mentioned; and in its day it was built securely. Instead of being dependent upon wire cables, like the more modern elevators of its kind, it was pulled up and down with hemp ropes running over drums next the roof; but at either side was a ratchet-arrangement into which cogged wheels on the car fitted and made certain the quick stoppage of the car if the rope broke and it started to plunge to the bottom of the shaft.

Patsy took in the fact of the presence of this ironwork instantly. And he believed that to an athlete it offered a means of egress from the bottom of the shaft.

The match died out and he dropped it and put his foot on the red coal. Then swiftly he stooped and unlaced his shoes, removed them, and, knotting the laces together, flung the shoes around his neck. He braced himself against either side of the well, felt out the ratchet-like ironwork with his toes and fingers, and began to climb upward.

The trick was easily enough performed for a few feet—even for a few yards; but Patsy was very well aware that unless somewhere above he found a loose, or open, door, he was very likely to fall back to the bottom.

And he could not expect a second fall to result as fortunately as his first. Besides, he might drop from a higher point.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained," was Patsy's motto, however. He gritted his teeth and grimly kept on up the shaft. The idea of remaining until daylight in the well did not appeal to him at all. He was ready to risk something to escape at once.

Where the fellow was whom he had followed clear from the East Side, and his pal who had tumbled him into this trap, Patsy Garvan did not know. That they were somewhere in this house he felt quite certain.

They were likely to get out by morning, however, and then Patsy's work would go for naught. Whatever trouble the hatless man had got into that had frightened him so, Patsy believed that it was a matter of moment, and might have connection with the very mystery which seemed to be troubling his chief at the time he had so suddenly parted from Nick Carter.

These thoughts, however, disturbed Patsy's mind at present but slightly. His whole attention was given to the effort in hand.

He scrambled up to a level with the first floor, from which he had been so unceremoniously tumbled, and upon feeling of the doors discovered that they were like those below, of course—without knobs on the inside.

But he could rest here on the narrow thresholds, and did so, thus obtaining relief for his sore feet, for climbing the ironwork was no easy matter; his stockings were already torn, and his toes cut by the sharp irons.

Patsy did not hesitate long, however. He had come thus far; he was determined to get farther up the shaft.

He doubted if the people he was after were on the ground floor, anyway. And if they were, and he could leave the shaft at some upper floor, it would be an easy matter to come down the stairway—much easier, in fact, than going up this shaft.

Yet he was determined to climb clear to the top, if need be, to find a way of escape. He knew that at the top there must be beams on which he could sit and rest. So he continued to ascend.

At the second floor all was dark as below, and as silent. He heard no sound of voices. He rested a little while, and then essayed the third part of his climb. The light which had made the upper part of the shaft brighter, was near now. Patsy soon saw that a faint glimmer came from under the door leading into the occupied side of the house. He pushed against the door, but it was firm. He listened, but at first heard nothing.

Then suddenly a door banged hollowly through the house—echoing, as Patsy believed, from below. For a moment the young fellow feared his enemies had returned to look down the shaft for him; but no light appeared below.

Then he heard—at first faintly, and then increasing rapidly—the sound of footsteps on the stairs. They mounted swiftly—reached the second floor—the third floor—came near to the door at which his ear was pressed.

For a moment Patsy was tempted to cry out; then he restrained himself and waited. What manner of man was this entering the house at this time of the night? Suspicion was roused in the listener's mind, and he waited.

The newcomer was a heavy man. He passed the door of the dumb-waiter and went on up another flight. Patsy glanced up and saw that the shaft was lighter above, as though another lamp burned in the hall of the fourth story.

The late arrival reached this fourth floor and halted. Then Patsy heard a sharp knock upon some panel. His curiosity greatly aroused, Patsy began to climb toward

that floor, being confident that there was no release for him lower down.

The rap was repeated while he scrambled up the well. Then a door was cautiously unlocked and opened.

"It's all right—it's me!" growled a deep voice.

"You, Suggs?"

"Of course, you fool!"

"Great heavens, man! Why did you come here?" gasped a frightened voice. "We thought you had made a getaway before this."

"Yer did, heh? Well, I don't see anything yet to be scare't of."

"Why, Mooney said——"

"Mooney's a blamed fool!" remarked the gruff voice, with an oath.

Then the speaker evidently stepped into a room and the door was closed.

But Patsy grinned delightedly in the dark. He was on the right track. His man was still here, and if he could only get out of this shaft he might certainly count himself as having climbed to luck!

## CHAPTER IX.

### NICK LISTENS TO A STORY.

Nick Carter was well aware that at least one member of the gang that had striven to enter the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank must be a cracksman of the first order.

No amateur at burglary had chosen the tools and arranged the plan for using the electric power in drilling into the bank vault. The tools were of the finest. At a glance Nick was assured that only two or three men in the country could have made some of them.

The tool-making burglar has gone out of fashion for the most part. The A1 cracksmen of the present day depend upon several very shrewd and conscienceless workmen, who supply their needs and charge them accordingly. As Nick saw, the outfit left on the roof of the bank must have stood the owner in a couple of thousand dollars!

The abandonment of the outfit proved that something very untoward had happened in the midst of the burglars' attempt to break into the bank. And the shooting of poor Burns, the watchman, was not the thing that had frightened the burglars away.

"The connection of young Daggett with the gang is not so easily explained," thought Nick, as he communed with himself after dismissing Danny. "It points—well, by Jove! it points to the man I'm really after!

"But hold on! don't let's jump at conclusions too quickly. I want to get Strusse on the hip so badly that I may be led astray. The big puzzle in this affair is why Ben Daggett should have been on that roof in evening dress? He was a 'gentleman burglar,' all right, as the papers say."

For already the early editions of the afternoon papers had gotten hold of the matter, and with flaunting headlines had told the story of the millionaire's nephew being found dead beside a kit of burglars' tools, on the roof of the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank.

A poor man and his family can get into trouble and it may be hidden from the public for some time—perhaps forever. But not so the millionaire and *his* kin. He must walk mighty circumspectly these days if he wishes to keep his reputation unsmirched!

And in this case the papers all had a good deal to say about young Ben Daggett's father going wrong, being the cause of the wrecking of the old North Side Mechanics' Bank, and his suicide.

The fact that for generations the family had been honored in and about New York and Connecticut did not matter now. Among the ancestors of the "gentleman burglar" was an honored governor of a State, a United States senator, congressmen, and State representatives galore, doctors, scientists, jurists. But every paper mentioned particularly that Ben Daggett was the son of "A. B. Daggett, the bank-wrecker."

"I declare! I'm surprised myself, after what Cleveland Parr told me, that this young man should turn out so bad," thought Nick Carter. "And I'll be bound that there's somebody else at the bottom of it. But he's as sharp as they make them, and it's a question whether he hasn't covered his tracks too well for anybody to find him out."

He had scarcely come to this conclusion when the quiet Joseph entered and placed two cards before him. Nick read them, and nodded, but with a puckered brow.

"Send them up, Joseph," he said. And then muttered to himself: "Now for it!"

He rose a minute later to welcome the young man who first entered the room.

"How are you, Cleveland?" he inquired, giving his hand to the visitor.

But he was looking over Parr's shoulder at the veiled lady who stood timidly in the doorway.

"Mr. Carter! I am glad we have found you in," exclaimed Parr. "I want to introduce to you Miss O'Neil. Oh! I beg pardon! forgive me! You, of course, know her. I had really forgotten."

Burton Strusse's private secretary was evidently in a much flustered state of mind. He was pale and haggard and his hands trembled from nervousness. Nick ignored him for the moment that he might gain command of himself, but stepped forward to greet Sallie O'Neil, Burton Strusse's ward and the heiress of the great General Jones O'Neil fortune.

"I am sorry I was not at home when you were here before, Miss Sallie," he said, in a low voice.

She had raised her veil, and now the look in her eyes told the detective to say nothing further about her previous visit to him. Parr did not know about it. But if the girl was surprised that Nick should know of her early morning call, she expressed no such feeling.

Nick led her to a seat beside his table and pointed Cleveland Parr to another. The detective looked sympathetically at the girl.

"Now, tell me what you want me to do, Miss Sallie?" he suggested.

"Mr. Carter! This is the third time I have either sent to you or come myself for help," murmured the young lady. "You have been very indulgent with me."

"I can assure you I am interested in you—and yours," he added, although she could not have known the deeper significance of those last two words!

"That is kind of you, Mr. Carter. And it seems as though only you might help me this time."

"My dear Miss Sallie! what threatens you now?"

"It is not for myself that I ask your help. Not for me!" she cried, wringing her hands.

"For who, then?" queried the detective, and he was certainly astonished at her emphasis.

"It is for poor Ben," declared Sallie O'Neil, dashing the tears from her lovely eyes and looking full at Nick Carter.

"For who, miss?" exclaimed the detective, startled in spite of himself.

"For Ben Daggett."

"But Mr. Daggett is——"

"He is dead! I know it. But do we not owe some duty to the dead? Is there nothing to be done for those who have gone beyond?" she cried sternly.

"I do not understand you, miss," said Nick simply.

"They tell me that it was you, Mr. Carter, who found Ben?"

"I was among those who found him—yes."

"It is fate!" exclaimed the girl. "You are bound to be tangled in our affairs, Mr. Carter. And you must help us."

"Help 'us'?" repeated Nick curiously.

"Help *me*, then."

'And how may I help you?"

"Help me to clear Ben's name. Mr. Carter, do you for a moment believe that Benjamin Daggett was guilty of belonging to the gang that tried to rob my uncle's bank?"

It was a flat question, and the girl looked straight at Nick and demanded her answer without equivocation. The detective felt himself upon delicate ground, and he sparred:

"I have not said I thought so."

"Ah! but you have said nothing to contradict it!" she cried.

"Believe me, Miss Sallie," he returned. "I was as amazed as you could possibly be yourself, to find Mr. Daggett there."

"But you think him a burglar?"

"I am not so sure of that,' returned Nick slowly.

"A confidant of burglars, then? Using his knowledge of the bank and its methods to help criminals?"

"It is a question that I had not gone into," said Nick firmly.

"Do you mean, Mr. Carter, that you are open to argument? That you have not made up your mind that Ben was guilty? That you have not already said in your heart: 'Like father, like son?'" demanded the anxious girl.

"Believe me, Miss Sallie, I am always open to conviction—I hope. I flatter myself that I am never hidebound in my opinions."

"Oh, sir! it is awful!" cried the girl. "Be patient with me," and she suddenly burst into tears.

"I tried to discourage her from coming here, Mr. Carter," murmured Cleveland Parr. "But she would enlist you in this matter."

"And what do you think yourself, Parr?" returned Nick, in a low voice, too.

"I don't know what to think!" exclaimed that young

man. "I—I wouldn't have believed it of Ben. It—it seems so useless—so unnecessary."

"And what does Burton Strusse say?" asked Nick.

"He repeats what the world repeats!" cried Sallie O'Neil, rising and stamping her foot vehemently.

She shook her eyes free of tears and her cheeks glowed and her lips parted. She was the picture of an outraged woman!

"He says: 'Like father, like son!' Oh, Mr. Carter, I have loved my guardian well. I have thought the world of him. But when he accepts such a condition without making a move to disprove the shame—when he is willing to let his nephew—the man who has been so faithful to his interests—be put in a shameful grave—then I feel that I must take up this work myself. Ben Daggett shall not lie in his grave under such suspicion. The matter shall be sifted. 'Like father, like son!'—yes, that may be true. Perhaps Ben's father has been maligned all these years, too."

"Oh, Miss Sallie!" cried Parr, starting up likewise. "What are you saying?"

"I don't care——"

"You are reflecting upon Mr. Strusse's own character now. He accepted his brother-in-law's crime as a misfortune rather than a fault. You know he made good the depositors' loss in the old bank. And he gave Ben every chance."

"Yes, yes!" cried the girl. "But he is giving him no chance now! Now that poor Ben is dead and cannot answer for himself, Guardy lets them all say what they please against Ben, and never raises his hand to stop them.

"I tell you, Mr. Carter, it is wicked! it is a shame! I do not believe Ben Daggett was on that roof to help break into the bank—or that he had anything to do with the attempt at robbery.

"Why should he go there right from Mrs. Mirrable's dance? Why, he was to take me home and I was waiting for him while he lay dead on that roof! It is awful! awful!

"Think of a man going to rob a bank in evening dress and kid gloves and a silk hat! It is preposterous, Mr. Carter! Do you not see it yourself?"

Nick Carter had listened to her outburst quietly, sitting back in his chair, his legs crossed and his fingertips fitted carefully together. He was as calm as a summer sea now. When she put this final question to him, he nodded slowly—but it was a noncommittal nod, and might have meant almost anything. But he said:

"Miss Sallie, you interest me—you interest me vastly. What I may have thought at first does not matter. There are many strange things in this world. I once saved a man from the gallows who was found lying beside his supposed victim, the bloody dagger in his hand. He was really the unfortunate person who had first found the stabbed man, had drawn the dagger from the wound, and, at sight of the blood, had fainted upon the corpse.

"Circumstantial exidence connects Mr. Ben Daggett with this attempt upon the Fruiterers' Bank. But circumstantial evidence is not the best of evidence. There is much, as you say, to be explained. Tell me all you can about it, Miss Sallie, and, believe me, I will plumb the depths till I hit upon the truth!"

"You will not be prejudiced, then, by his father's reputation?" she cried.

"I will clear his name if he is guiltless!" repeated the detective firmly.

## CHAPTER X.

### WHERE SUSPICION POINTED.

Miss O'Neil seemed to take heart from Nick's rising interest, and, sitting down again, she began:

"Mr. Carter, I suppose you know all about the misfortune which early shadowed poor Ben's life?"

"I know what the public seems to know about his father's suicide in the North Side Mechanics' Bank," returned Nick. "He was cashier, his accounts were short $112,000, and he shot himself. The bank went to the wall, and the courts did not hold the directors. But after nine months Mr. Strusse, who was a director in the bank, paid the depositors in full.

"I know, too," added Nick, watching her closely, "that there was some feeling between Mrs. Daggett and her brother. She would not live in his house, although he tried to make provision for her——"

"Oh, dear, Mr. Carter! You detectives always know people's most private affairs," interrupted Miss Sallie, with a pout. "Poor Auntie Daggett was not quite right in her mind, I fear."

"Ben's mother?"

"Yes. Her husband's shooting himself, I think, turned her mind. Or why should she so positively hate her brother as to warn Ben to keep away from him with her last breath?"

"Did she do that?" asked Nick quickly.

"She did. It was a great grief to Mr. Strusse, I know. He has often spoken of it very touchingly. She was his favorite playmate when they were children, and he actually *made* Mr. Daggett. The Daggetts, although coming of an old family, were poor. He could really do nothing for Ben until Auntie Daggett was dead."

"Ah!" murmured Nick, but made no further comment at the moment.

"Merely that his father was a suicide and seemingly a defaulter, and that perhaps his mother's mind was not just right, does not prove that Ben Daggett was a born criminal," cried the girl.

"I agree with you there, Miss Sallie," said Nick. "The matter of heredity is carried too far nowadays."

"I have known him all my life," pursued the girl. "Just as I have known Harold Strusse. Of course, Ben was considerably older than Harold and I."

She sobbed and put her handkerchief to her eyes again. But in a moment she had regained control of her emotion.

"Ben has been Mr. Strusse's right-hand man. Oh! I can't conceive of such cruelty as this which Mr. Strusse shows——"

"I beg pardon?" questioned Nick, in some expressed surprise.

"Is it not cruel to believe that Ben was a burglar, without question?" she demanded.

"Oh!"

"Mr. Strusse should never have believed it!" cried the girl vigorously. "I never would have thought him so unjust. He had been tenderness itself to me. My own father could have been no kinder."

Nick winced and looked away. His private opinion—well established by facts he had unearthed in connection with the "death" of Arthur Towne, Miss Sallie's fiancé—was not exactly the same as her own, regarding Mr. Burton Strusse's goodness!

"And now he refuses to have the matter investigated. He begs to have the terrible business hushed up. He declares it will ruin the family's honor to investigate. Oh! it is maddening!"

"You are not afraid of what may arise from an impartial examination of how Ben Daggett came to be on the bank roof?" asked Nick quietly.

"No, indeed!"

"Suppose it is proven that he was knowing to the burglary and was a member of the gang?"

"Then the exact facts will be better than all this suspicion!" cried the girl. "Though I do not believe such a discovery possible."

"Or suppose it clutches in its grasp some other member of the family?"

"Whom do you mean?" exclaimed Miss Sallie, startled.

"I do not say I mean anybody. I am merely putting a possibility."

"A possibility?"

"Yes."

"Oh! you do not believe it possible?"

"Anything is possible," Nick returned calmly.

"I do not care! Even if you were to prove *me* guilty, I must know!" she cried.

"That is speaking broadly."

"I mean what I say. Let the truth be known."

"'Hew to the line, let the chips fall where they may'—eh?" queried Nick, smiling.

"I want the truth."

"And if I take the matter up, you shall learn the truth, Miss Sallie. The truth may hurt—remember that. But whatever I learn I shall put before you. The time, I believe, has come for that," added the detective to himself.

"What is that you say?" she asked, puzzled.

"Come!" Nick Carter exclaimed more briskly. "Let us get all the facts known. Tell me all you know about Mr. Daggett's movements last evening. That will be a beginning."

"He took me to Mrs. Mirrible's dance. It was agreed he should remain and take me home. Ben was a splendid dancer, but he did not go into society much. In his secret heart, I believe his father's record always troubled him. He hated to face strangers for fear something might be said."

"Just so."

"He seemed just the same as ever. Why, if he had contemplated such a crime, would he have joked, and talked lightly, and been so companionable?"

"Hold on! hold on, Miss Sallie!" admonished Nick. "Stick to the plain relation of circumstances, please."

"Very well. But there's nothing more to tell."

"Suppose I ask you a few questions?"

"I will answer, sir."

"You dined *en famille* last evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"No visitor present?"

"Oh, no."

"All the family there?"

Cleveland Parr suddenly started, was about to speak, and then sat back in his chair. Miss Sallie murmured:

"Oh, yes."

Nick appeared to notice nothing, and went on evenly:

"Mr. Daggett was quite as usual?"

"Yes, indeed, he was!"

"You had noticed nothing odd about him of late?"

"No."

"He had not been away from home more than commonly?"

"No, indeed. His habits were most regular. He read a great deal. Mr. Parr can tell you."

"I am not asking Mr. Parr," said Nick, smiling. "I want your opinion of Ben Daggett."

"Then here it is!" cried the girl warmly. "He was a faithful friend, a gentleman, a manly, sweet-tempered man! It would have been entirely foreign to his nature to have shown ingratitude. And it would have been the basest ingratitude for him to have robbed, or helped to rob, Mr. Strusse's bank."

"Quite so. Now, another thing. He went with you to this dance?"

"So I told you."

"And did he leave you there, merely?"

"Why, no. He danced with me thrice."

"When?"

"Soon after we arrived. My card was not filled till later."

"When did you lose sight of him?"

"I really could not tell you, Mr. Carter. I must say I enjoyed myself hugely last night. It seems criminal to say so, after what has happened. But it was the first social affair I had been to since—for some months."

Nick Carter knew that the girl had deprived herself of pleasure for some time owing to her guardian's trickery regarding the mysterious "Arthur Towne," to whom Miss Sallie had been engaged through correspondence.

"Have you the card of dances?" asked Nick briefly.

"Here? Why, no, sir!"

"When did you arrive at the Mirribles?"

"About a quarter to nine."

"Dancing had then begun?"

"Oh, a few couples were on the floor."

"Mr. Daggett danced first with you?"

"Yes. And the second dance, too."

"Then?"

"A friend 'talked out' the third dance. Then Mr. Daggett came again. He was a good dancer, and he knew I enjoyed the exercise."

"Just so. This would have brought it to something like half-after nine?"

"Nearer ten, Mr. Carter."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. And I saw Mr. Daggett some minutes after he had given me over to my next partner. I remember, now."

"Anything remarkable about his appearance at that time?"

"Why—no! He was going toward the door of the ballroom. There was a crowd then, and, now that I think of it, he seemed in a hurry."

"Then this was somewhere near ten?"

"It must have been."

"You can't be sure whether it was before, or after?"

"No, sir, I cannot. But it was within a few minutes of the hour, either way."

"Just so. And the Mirribles live on Madison Avenue, about five blocks above the street on which the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank is situated?" continued Nick Carter.

"Yes, Mr. Carter. Oh, I realize that all this goes to show how near Ben was at about the time those awful men tried to get into the bank, and shot Burns."

"Yes. He could have gone there—if he went direct."

"He certainly did not stop to change his clothes before trying to break into the bank," said the girl, with scorn.

"That would have aided in an excellent alibi, you know," suggested Nick quietly. "Yet it seems unnecessary. We can possibly trace Mr. Daggett's movements after you saw him. Of course, there were plenty of people at the dance who knew him?"

"Indeed, yes! He was popular with the men, at least. I think that Ben was a trifle afraid of the ladies."

"Miss Sallie has suggested a reason for that, Mr. Carter," interposed Cleveland Parr. "Ben feared that somebody might pass some comment on his father's memory. He feared that matters would not go to have

their daughters in the company of the son of a bank-wrecker."

"It was a shame!" ejaculated Sallie O'Neil.

Nick came out of his reverie.

"Well, Miss Sallie!" he said. "This is all you can tell me?"

"I—I believe so. You can see yourself how preposterous it would have been for him to belong to that gang, to attend me to the dance, and to appear at the scene of the robbery in such clothing as he wore."

"I will investigate that to the full, believe me," said Nick, as both his visitors arose.

"I hope you will, sir," said the girl wistfully. "Remember that nothing but the truth will satisfy me now. I must know it. For I believe that the truth will clear Ben Daggett's name."

She turned to the door and Nick crossed the room to politely hold it open for her. He motioned Cleveland Parr to remain an instant, and when Miss Sallie was outside in the hall and Joseph was bowing her to the stairway, the detective closed the door softly and seized Cleveland by the wrist.

"Who was the member of the family absent from the dinner-table last evening, Cleveland?" Nick asked sharply.

"Eh? I—oh——"

"Tell me!" commanded the detective.

"Why, Harold."

"Harold Strusse?"

"Yes, sir. But I do not think that he had anything to do with this business, sir. He would not dare," whispered Cleveland Parr.

"Why not?"

"His father would send him to jail, I believe. Why! he would not allow him to eat with the family, or to remain in the house. Mr. Strusse treats Harold very harshly."

"Then why would not Harold kick over the traces?"

"His father has him watched all the time."

"Indeed? Where does Harold live?"

Cleveland passed Nick a card on which the address was written.

"All right. Keep a tight mouth on you, Parr. And remember this! I am going to the bottom of this thing, and there'll something drop before long, whether young Daggett was a rascal or not."

"Great heavens, Mr. Carter!" stammered Parr, under his breath. "I daren't think anything else."

"Anything else than what?"

"Than that poor Ben was tempted, and fell."

"And why not?"

"Then, sir, if he was the victim of a conspiracy, *somebody else was guilty*, and that somebody was guilty of his father's overthrow and suicide, as well!"

"By Jove! Cleveland, you *can* take a hint when a ton of coal falls on you, can't you?" murmured Nick, letting him out.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PATSY REPORTS.

Nick Carter stood a moment at the top of the stairs and watched his two visitors down. Then he returned to his room, closed the door, sat down before his table, and, first of all, looked at the card in his hand.

On it was penciled the address of the place where Harold Strusse had been staying since he had been completely on his father's bad books, and had been actually banished from association with the family.

And, well as Nick was prepared for surprises in this business of his, he really started when he read the number and street. It was on the very block with the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank, and the detective could swear that it was not many doors away from that institution.

"Ah! the plot thickens," murmured Nick, smiling grimly. "Now, I wonder if Patsy——"

His phone rang, and he put the receiver to his ear. The voice of the very person of whom he had thought reached his ear.

"Is this you, Nick?"

"Yes. You're Patsy?"

"Betcher life! And I'm in a pickle, Nick."

"As usual?"

"Huh?"

"Is there a woman in it?" chuckled Nick.

"Not so's you'd notice it. I'm at the 30th Street station, and I want the sarge here to send around into 32d Street and arrest some parties for me."

"Who?"

"Well, there's Rio Mooney, and 'Suggs' Hatch, and another fellow whose monika I don't know."

"Ah!" muttered Nick thoughtfully.

"Hello!" exclaimed Patsy. "He don't want to do it."

"Who don't?"

"The sarge. You see, all I got against them is suspicious characters, and that old charge of attempted

kidnaping against Rio won't go now. But I believe something's up."

"There ought to be—after the way you left me last night," said Nick, with sudden sternness.

"Well, I saw Rio run out of a cellar on that street, and he looked scared. Then he met this other feller and 'Suggs.' You know 'Suggs'?"

"By reputation. He's an A1 bank-burglar."

"Well, they've either pulled off, or tried to pull off, a game. That's sure."

"You haven't been reading the papers this morning, Patsy, I take it?"

"Me? Gee!" ejaculated Patsy. "I been so busy since I left you that I ain't either slept or eat, let alone attend to me education."

"All right. You're on, Patsy. Ask the sergeant to come to the phone. If you gather those boys in you'll about close up a very pretty case for me, Patsy. Rio Mooney came from Brazil, didn't he?"

"Sure. He's a half-breed."

"He just fills the bill. All right.. Let me speak to the sergeant."

And Nick spoke to such good purpose that the acting captain of the police-station sent around and gathered in the men Patsy pointed out. Young Garvan then went home in a cab, and glad he was to get there, take a bath, and, while he ate a very late breakfast, make a more complete report to his chief.

"Gee! but I certainly had the time of me life getting out of that well," said Patsy, when he had brought the account of his adventures up to the point where he had heard "Suggs" Hatch, the burglar, enter the fourth floor flat, where Rio Mooney was already in hiding.

"You ought to see my feet! I'll keep off 'em for a day or two, you bet!"

"But I see that you *did* get out of the elevator-shaft?" said Nick dryly.

"Of course, else I wouldn't be here," grinned Patsy. "I climbed clear to the roof. There was a beam there to rest on. And there was a narrow loft under the flat roof, too—all open. Oh, it was a cinch!"

"I should presume so," returned Nick quietly. "It's a wonder you hadn't broken your neck, my boy."

"Not me! Well, when I got my breath, I dropped down through the scuttle of this loft into the hall. It took me some time to get the scuttle open, but I did it.

"Then I went below and spotted the right flat. I heard Suggs and Rio talking some. It was near daylight then. You can bet it all did not happen in a minute."

"And you've been there since?"

"There was an empty flat next to the one those crooks occupied. I hid in that. I hung around intending to follow out the first one that left and so get a chance at a phone and call you up. But they made it up to keep under cover till to-night. No wonder, considering that they'd dropped all their tools on top of that bank, as the paper says. I saw it as I came along in the cab. You certainly were bright to get next to the fact that the electric flash was out of the common, Nick," added Patsy admiringly.

"And I can return the compliment," answered the chief. "I did not really notice Rio Mooney when he ran into us. It was a clue that would have been lost to us had it not been for you.

"I knew that a peculiar electric display, such as I noticed when the lights went out, showed that living flesh had received the full strength of the power-wire. I could have sworn to it, and that electrician bore me out."

"And Ben Daggett was in with those crooks?" muttered Patsy.

"That's the question. We're to look into that," returned Nick slowly.

"You have some doubt of it, then?"

"I have been asked to get at the truth. There is some doubt, as you say."

"I'd believe Harold Strusse mixed up in it first. He was hand in glove with Rio Mooney."

"Indeed? That looks feasible," and Nick smiled. "By the way, did you note the number of the house Rio came running out of last night?"

"I know the number, all right," said Patsy, with assurance.

"Does that, by any chance, happen to be it?" queried Nick again, thrusting Cleveland Parr's penciled card under his assistant's nose.

"That's it, exactly," admitted Patsy. "Gee! I don't see but what you've been doing something yourself."

"This came to me," explained Nick, smiling. Then he added briskly:

"Come, Patsy; send word for Danny to bring around the car. We'll take a trip over to this place and see what we can find. It looks to me as though there was a nigger in the wood-pile, and we're likely to show him up before long."

## CHAPTER XII.

### BROUGHT TO BAY.

Nick Carter had spent some of his forenoon in making certain inquiries which would now come into play. As they rode to the house named by Cleveland Parr as being the boarding-place of Burton Strusse's recreant son, the detective arranged certain matters in his mind and prepared mentally an arraignment of the whole affair, and of those engaged in the attempted looting of the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank.

Since Nick Carter had first become acquainted with the affairs of the Wood Pulp Trust director, he had kept a close watch upon one particular part of that magnate's business. He had told Strusse he should do this, and there were ways of letting the supposed millionaire know that he was keeping his word.

Many a frenzied financier's millions are on paper for the most part. It was so with Burton Strusse. He had many irons in the fire, and some of his schemes were paying well and promised better. But many were in embryo only, and it took a lot of ready cash and a splendid credit to swing them.

Strusse had the entire management of the great O'Neil fortune, of which Miss Sallie was the sole heiress. If she did not marry until she was 25 years of age, Strusse was still to command that fortune.

By trickery Strusse made it very problematical whether the girl would even marry at that time. And if she did not, unless her faith was shaken in her guardian, he was likely to command her money for some further years.

Nick Carter had watched the financier so closely that he could not involve the O'Neil fortune in his speculations; but Nick believed that the Wood Pulp Trust magnate's other affairs were not so prosperous.

"There may be a deep reason for all this," thought the astute detective, as Danny drove him and his assistant toward their destination. "Considering what Strusse has already been guilty of, I would not believe him incapable of using his nephew as a shield for his own rascality—nor that nephew's father before him! And as for his son, this young scamdrel, Harold——"

He did not finish the thought. They were at the house in question. Nick alighted, beckoned to the policeman who chanced to be passing, left him to watch the street, and took Patsy with him into the house. They entered by the basement.

"You have a young man boarding here named Strusse?" he asked an acid-faced lady, who proved to be the mistress of the household.

"We have, sir. But he is ill, and you cannot see him."

"Indeed, I am sorry to hear that he is ill. This is sudden, isn't it?"

"I'm not in the habit of having my house made into a hospital," snapped the lady. "This hasn't been going on for long, you may believe. And it won't continue for long, either!"

"Mr. Strusse was taken ill last night?"

"None of us knew about it if he was, until this morning. His father is up-stairs with him now. Now, pray tell me your business, sir?"

"I've got to see the elder Strusse, madam. Will you let my young man wait in the yard?"

"In the yard?" ejaculated the boarding-house keeper. "I should say not! What for?" she added, her curiosity getting the better of her acidity of temper.

Nick approached cautiously and whispered in her flattered ear. Her eyes grew round with wonder, but her color rose.

"Do you tell me the truth?" she demanded.

Nick showed her the badge he always wore inside his vest for use in just such emergencies.

"Well, I declare! I understood them Strusse's were very nice folks."

"Oh, I wouldn't say a word against them," declared Nick.

"And I keep a respectable house, I hope."

"I hope you do, ma'am, I'm sure," admitted the detective as he nodded to the grinning Patsy, and took his own way up the stairs, with the landlady at his heels.

However, his wind was better than hers, and he was a lap ahead when he reached the top of the upper flight. There was a half-open door out of which a physician was bowing himself.

"He will do very well now, Mr. Strusse. I can assure you of that," the professional man was saying. "And trust me. I am mum!"

There was a growl from inside. Nick put the doctor aside with no gentle hand, pushed open the door before the man behind it could turn the key, closed it quietly, but quickly, and turned the key in the lock himself.

He faced Burton Strusse.

"Well, Nick Carter!" growled the man, at last. "You have butted into this thing, too, have you? I hope you are suited. There is my son on the bed, threatened with

brain fever. You find me nursing him, and trying to keep the situation from the blasted papers!"

"Why?" queried Nick, flashing a single glance at the bed, and then looking steadily at the heavily jowled Strusse.

"Why, confound you! Why should any man take pains to save his son from the grave?"

"You've found your affection for that boy rather late, haven't you?" demanded Nick coldly. "And wouldn't it be a good plan to show a little for your nephew?"

"Who do you mean?" snarled Strusse.

"I mean Ben Daggett."

"You're a fool! What do you mean by bringing that scoundrel into this matter?"

"So he's a scoundrel, is he?"

"What do you call a fellow who is the associate of bank-robbers and who was killed while endeavoring to get into a bank? Heavens! don't you suppose I feel the disgrace of it? But, 'like father, like son!' I might have looked for just this finish for Ben."

"Yes—you—might! Let me tell you something, Burton Strusse. I refrained from ruining you once. I'm not going to do it this time."

"What do you mean?" gasped the other, and his hand went behind him quickly.

"Don't do it! Show your hands—palms out!" snapped Nick. "I hate to spoil this coat I'm wearing, but you'll notice the outline of my gun in the pocket—and you may believe that the muzzle is pointed at your black heart! Show your hands, I say!"

He spoke fiercely, but so low that nobody could have heard outside, nor did he disturb the sick boy in his drug-induced slumber.

"I'll take that gun, if you please!" exclaimed the detective, stepping closer, and frisking the man in most approved fashion.

"Confound you!" snarled Strusse. "You'll pay for this."

"But you won't sign the receipt, Strusse. Your jig is up, I tell you," said Nick Carter. "The minute I knew your boy was in this house I saw through your whole game. But, then, as Suggs has turned State's evidence, it would have all come home to you, anyway."

This was a chance shot, but it hit home. Strusse started, and his usually ruddy face paled.

"I admit," chuckled Nick, watching him, "that Suggs has been given to believe that you played him false. And he hated to lose those tools, too. Of course, you paid for them, but they were to be a part of his payment, eh?"

Strusse gasped and sat down suddenly. He loosened his collar. He was a fat man and this was a good deal of a shock to him.

"The whole game is up, I tell you," pursued Nick, feeling his way. "Just why you wanted to have that bank robbed I don't know yet; but I guarantee that the auditors will find out before they get through. Perhaps there isn't so much cash and negotiable papers in that vault as appears on the books, eh?

"And as your son, here, had got in with some crooks—notably this Rio Mooney—you thought you would use them to your own good—eh? And like enough you threatened Harold with jail for the theft of that money and jewelry from his employer, unless he fell into this scheme with you, eh?"

Strusse bowed his head on his hand and said nothing.

Nick ventured further. He spoke slowly, and his tone and words made Strusse wince like the blows of a whiplash.

"Rio got Suggs into it. The plan was laid beautifully. They were to get to the bank roof through this house. That's why Harold was sent away from home. Oh, you villain!"

Nick wanted mightily to get up, there and then, and kick the fellow. Strusse did not look at him.

"I guarantee that you it was who gave poor Burns the poisoned whisky. But Burns had to be shot, after all. Suggs did that, I suppose, though he denies it.

"And the whole thing would have gone through nicely, even after that, if your nephew hadn't tried to stop the dastardly work. Isn't that so?"

Strusse did not look up, but he moaned.

"Is that right?" exclaimed Nick earnestly.

"Yes," whispered Strusse, nodding again.

"He came here to see Harold, I suppose?"

Another nod on the other's part.

"And followed the boy and the burglars to the bank roof?"

"Yes."

"And they killed him?"

"By accident," whispered Strusse again. "He came upon them and startled them. Rio let go of the severed wire and it struck Ben across the breast and killed him instantly. So Harold told me."

Nick leaped toward him with a sudden cry. The man's voice sounded hoarse and labored. Suddenly Nick had seen blood dripping from one of his wrists.

"What are you doing?" he gasped, flinging Strusse back in his chair and seizing the bleeding wrist, where a vein had been opened.

"Too—too late!" whispered Strusse, his face pallid. "It's the poison. I had some left after drugging Burns' whisky. It's death when it gets into the blood."

A small vial dropped from his almost paralyzed grasp. His right side was already stiffening, as Nick could see.

"No matter. You can't stop me now. It—was—the—last—card," gasped Strusse.

Then he suddenly roused himself with an effort.

"Ben—Ben is guiltless. And Ben's father! 'Like father, like son!' I—I made him shoot himself. I had things fixed so that the evidence pointed to him. But I had the money. Both Ben—and—his—father——"

He struggled to speak further, he gasped, sat up, and managed to repeat:

"They are not guilty!"

Then he fell back. The startled detective ran to the door, opened it, and called back the doctor. The medical man worked over him for an hour; but it was no use. The strange poison from Brazil was in his blood, and he ceased to breathe long before they were willing to give over their efforts for his life!

* * * * * * *

The reason for it *was* easily found when Mr. Burton Strusse's private affairs were looked into, and the affairs of the Fruiterers' Exchange Bank, as well. In that institution was a lot of rotten securities that the president had wished to make disappear along with the cash in its vault.

Suggs Hatch did not turn State's evidence, but young Harold Strusse did. The burglar and Rio went over the road each for a long term, and the young scion of the Strusse family is still under surveillance, as it is believed that he will never be quite right again. The dreadful death of his unfortunate cousin on the roof of the bank had quite shaken his mind as well as his nerves.

The senior Strusse had had too many irons in the fire. Not a venture was he in that did not crash when he died so horribly. Only the fortune belonging to Sallie O'Neil was left untouched.

Some of his old friends will tell you now how that fact showed how really honorable at heart Burton Strusse was! They do not know that for months only the fear of Nick Carter had kept the great fortune left by General Jones O'Neil to his daughter intact.

As for Miss Sallie O'Neil herself, she was suddenly made the custodian of her own fortune. The courts might have stepped in and appointed a new guardian and administrator to act until she was 25, had it not been for a word whispered into a certain young man's ear by Nick Carter himself.

In fact, it was several words. The detective took Cleveland Parr, one-time private secretary of Strusse, aside, and said to him:

"Here, you blithering idiot! Don't you know enough to strike when the iron's hot?"

"Why, Mr. Carter, I don't understand you?" cried the young man, in round-eyed surprise.

"What's going to become of Sallie?"

"I—I really don't know, sir. It worries me a good deal," admitted Cleveland.

"Well, you don't see any way out of it?"

"No, sir."

"I'll tell you," said Nick.

"Do so, sir."

"She must marry."

Cleveland Parr's face fell a mile!

"That settles the whole thing. Then her money comes to her, and her husband can help her take care of it."

"But—but the husband——"

"For goodness sake, Cleveland, get a move on! Ask her yourself."

"*Me?*"

"Of course. Why not? Ask her before some other fellow does."

"But she wouldn't have me," stuttered Cleveland.

"Did you ever ask her?"

"No-o. I didn't dare. She thought so much of Arthur Towne——"

"A person, I tell you frankly, who never had an existence! She only *thought* she thought a lot of him. You go to her and ask her to marry you. She might be induced to think of it."

And evidently Miss Sallie was so induced, for a month later they were quietly married, and neither of them have had need of Nick Carter's services since.

THE END.

The next number, 577, will contain "A Double-Barreled Puzzle; or, Patsy's Big Conundrum."

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## TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Burmah is tucked away so carefully in an obscure corner of the earth, and its stores of precious metals have been so jealously guarded by the Burman and the Chinaman, his nearest neighbor to the north, that access to this land of treasures has been exceedingly difficult, and not until the last century has the western world been allowed to share, to any extent, this seemingly inexhaustible supply of mineral ores and lumber.

Rangoon, situated near the mouth of the Irrawaddy, is the capital and largest city of Burmah, a crowded and busy place, full of interesting people and curious pagodas, and the most important rice-shipping port in the world.

The banks of the river are literally alive with wild game of every description.

Toward evening the trees are filled with chattering monkeys, amusing themselves by pelting coconuts at the pretty Shan girls at their work gathering orchids and india-rubber; adjutant-birds—large pelicans—parade the shore in the early morning in search of fish, and elephants are often heard trumpeting in the jungle.

At Mingoung, a small village just above Mandalay, stands the second largest bell in the world, weighing one hundred and three tons, and not far from the bell is the largest piece of solid masonry, a cube of two hundred and fifty feet, relics of the Burman's departed greatness.

Bhamo, the great trading-post between Upper Burmah and China, lies close to the river, twenty-five miles above the Second Defile. In 1885, Bhamo was supposed to belong to China, but the British have been carefully and quietly pushing the boundary-line to the north, and to-day not only Bhamo, but all the country one hundred and sixty miles to the north, is controlled by the British and guarded by British and native Indian troops.

One drawback to Burmah is the Burman, a happy-go-lucky, licentious rascal, who says that if the British intend to rule they must do all the work. The Burman prefers to strut about in silks, with an eight-inch cheroot of green tobacco in his mouth, without a pice to buy rice for his next meal. Some call him the Irishman of the East, for he's good-natured and appreciates a joke; others say he is a born gentleman, because he will not work. Whatever he may be, he does his country little good.

The pride of Burmah is the Burmese girl. She appears in public with a heavy piece of silk wound just below the arms and hanging loose to the knees, a pair of sandals for her dainty feet, and a knot of jet-black hair on the top of her head; her teeth are like pearls, and there is a wicked look in her fiery eyes.

The religion of Burmah is Buddhism. Shrines dedicated to the great Prince Gautama of two thousand years ago are to be seen everywhere, in the shape of bell-shaped and seven-roofed pagodas. The Burman's moral code is the strictest that the world has ever known, but, for all that, he is far from a moral being.

The Burmese are a highly civilized people, with the most improved forms of government and codes of law, doubtless due to their close contact with the Chinese, who lived among them and made fortunes from them for centuries.

The Chinaman is still the powerful element, as far as numbers and wealth are concerned, for in every town the largest business concerns are managed and often owned by the shrewd Chinaman, and in Upper Burmah most of the population is a mixture of Chinese and Chin, or Shan, blood.

The Chinese merchant of Burmah is extremely polite, and in broken English gives one the impression that the Chinese have been, and intend to be, the most independent and highly civilized nation of the East, though he is forced to reluctantly admit that Burmah, that land of untold wealth, is no longer his, no longer the Burman's, but wholly and indisputably British.

## INDIAN TOM.

Very few broadcloth coats were to be seen in the streets of Cheyenne, but buckskin suits were plentiful, with here and there some bleary-eyed individual, whose very appearance in the way of dress bespoke his downfall and loss of manhood.

A woman rides by at a gallop: one can see at a glance that she is young, pretty, and "nervy."

She exchanges nods with a number of men in the crowd.

Some stranger, who is astonished at her appearance, says, not to any one in particular:

"Who is she?"

Some one in the crowd replies:

"Why, stranger, that's Lottie—every one knows her hereabouts. I reckon you didn't hear tell about her killin' Pat Callahan, at Benton, a week ago? She's a good one, yer bet!"

"She looks like it."

By this time Lottie had reached the street leading to Stebbins, Post & Co.'s bank, and pulled up with a jerk as she saw the man she was evidently looking for.

A tall man, with raven-black curly hair, dressed in buckskin.

This was Indian Tom, the hero of many a hunting-adventure and shooting-scrape.

Tom saw that Lottie wanted to speak to him, so he moved out of the crowd into the street, shook hands with her, and twisting the mane of her pony in his hand, looked up, and said:

"Waal, Lottie, what's up? Yer look kind of troubled."

"Tom, are you going to Rawlins to-night?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to take that money up for the contractors?"

"How did yer know?"

"Never mind; answer me. Are you?"

"Yes."

"You know, Tom, there is nothing between us but friendship, and I took a vow that if ever the time came, I would be even with you for what you did that night at Benton for me. So mind what I say—look sharp, for you'll have company on the cars."

"What's up?"

"Can't tell; but there are men watching you who are aware that you are down here again after money. Last night I heard Curley say to Black Sam that you were in town, and caught Sam's reply, something about 'fixing you'; and I think some one will try and kill you on the cars. Any one with you?"

"No. When do you think they will strike fur it?"

"Can't say; but they are certain to try. And they know you don't scare, so there will be plenty of them. Good-by."

"Take care of yerself; now I know I will get through all right or die a-tryin'. I would wait till sum of the men cum down to go back with me, but I can't; it would take too much time. And, besides, every one expects his money to-morrow. It's pay-day, yer know."

With a firm shake of the hand the two separated—one to mingle again in the crowd, the other to gallop off down the street.

Tom sauntered along.

His mind was full of what he had heard.

He did not fear a fight; but what he did fear was the loss of the men's money, which they had worked so hard for; and, besides, an unknown and uncertain danger had a kind of fascination for Tom.

"If I only had a couple of comrades with me it would be fun," he muttered.

And with that as a last thought he wended his way back to the bank, having already told Stebbins, the principal partner, that he would be there just in time to get the money and catch the train, and to have the money put up in packages.

As he entered the bank, Gillick, the cashier, greeted him:

"Tom, walk into the private room."

With an "all right," he elbowed his way through those waiting to be attended to, and went into the private room, where he found Mr. Post.

"Well, Tom, punctual as usual. You see we are ready for you"—pointing to the money done up as Tom had desired. "I'm glad you are going to take it, not me."

"I've carried it 'fore safe, an' kin again."

"I know you have, Tom; but our detective says there are a number of Curley's robbers in town, and Curley himself, and if they know about this business of yours they may give you trouble. I hope they won't; but I've always considered it risky, and wondered why a party was not sent with you."

Here Tom told Mr. Post all that had passed between himself and Lottie, and reiterated his determination to go.

The money was handed him in packages compressed as small as possible, but even then they were bulky.

Tom placed the money inside of his shirt, looked to his arms to see if they were all right, and with a cheerful good-by to Post, started for the train.

The latter consisted of five passenger-coaches, with the usual number of box cars.

The cars were pretty well crowded with passengers.

Tom got a seat by himself by great good luck, and situated at the end of the car, not commodious, but, under the circumstances, the best for him, as it gave him a view of the passengers. It faced them, and, besides, no one could get behind him.

By the time he had got comfortably fixed, and taken a leisurely survey of his fellow passengers, the train started.

He did not notice anything peculiar about any of the men in the car; they looked like the same class of people he had seen a hundred times, and he began to think that, after all, Lottie might have been mistaken, when his attention was attracted by a young girl entering the car, looking for a seat.

She was plainly but neatly dressed, and looked to be just the age between girlhood and womanhood; about medium height, with brown hair and eyes and rather delicate features.

No one offered her a seat; those that had one to themselves, when they saw her, looked out of the window, or pretended to be asleep; but a close observer would have seen that she did not try very hard to attract the attention of any one to her want, and would have noticed that she passed for a second near two men seated about the middle of the car, and cast an appealing glance at one of them, he making a motion behind the back of the seat for her to go on.

Tom, although unacquainted with the usages of society, as she approached him, got up, and with a kind, friendly smile, said:

"Yer look kind of tired; sit down here."

She thanked him; and, as she took the seat, said, seeing that he was going to stand:

"There is plenty of room for us both. I do not wish to deprive you of your seat; please sit down, sir!"

Tom sat down, and the girl soon saw that she would have to push the talking, so said:

"When do we get to Benton?"

"At eleven o'clock. Are you going that fur?"

"Yes; I expect to meet my father. He works in the shop at Rawlins—at the what do you call it?"

"The round-house."

"Yes, that's the name. You may know him; he is called Bowman."

"Yer don't say yer father's Tom Bowman? I reckon I does know him, an' right waal, too; but I never heard tell ev his havin' a daughter. How old ar' yer, miss?"

The girl hesitated and blushed, for she had chanced the name, and, besides, she was engaged in a business that was repulsive to her.

Tom, suspecting nothing, but seeing that she was worried, said:

"Never mind; gurls don't like ter tell their age. I am pretty waal known as Indian Tom. I'm going ter Benton myself, an' in ter Rawlins, an' will see ter yer fur Bowman's sake; an', besides, yer may be ev help ter me. I've got a pile ev money h'ar"—pointing to where his shirt was sticking out. "It is the money to pay ther tie-men an' graders, an' four eyes is better than two. So, miss, ef yer see any one makin' kind ev queer moves, nudge me."

"I'll not fail," she said, with a peculiar smile. "But there's no danger, is there, with all these people around?"

"They don't make no difference. Robbers 'long this line er pretty bold."

"My! what pretty pistols you've got. Won't you let me see them?"

"Sartainly! They is mighty nice things ter have," Tom said, as he handed them to her.

Miss Bowman—so called—unperceived by Tom, had taken out two of the cartridges, but, through nervousness, let one of them fall.

This attracted Tom's attention at once.

"Be keerful! What ar' yer 'bout? Yer must not do that! Yer have dropped a cartridge out."

As Tom said this he looked sharply at her, stooped and picked up the cartridge, and returned it to its chamber.

But he noticed nothing in Miss Bowman's manner, except what would be natural to one being spoken to so sternly; and, believing it was only carelessness, said:

"Yer must not mind me bein' somewhat rough; but I don't like any one ter fool with my pistols en that ar' way. No harm done."

For some time nothing passed between these two.

But had Tom been a close observer he would have seen some very significant signs pass from the two men in the middle of the car to the girl; but he did not, and as the whistle blew, denoting that they were approaching Rocky Creek Station, Tom turned, and said:

"Ye ain't annoyed at me, is yer, miss?"

"No, indeed."

"Waal, then, cum and git sum supper," said Tom.

"With pleasure," answered the girl.

And when the train stopped, Tom helped her out, and both entered the dining-hall in the neighborhood with the crowd.

The two men alluded to had been close observers of what took place between Tom and the girl, and, when they left the train, they were at once joined by a number of other men, from various parts of the train, and after a whispered conference all of them entered the dining-hall, taking care to avoid attracting particular attention, and took seats at another table than that Tom sat at.

After eating a hearty supper, Tom started for the door.

He was closely followed by Miss Bowman, who, while he was paying for their meals, managed, standing behind him, to seize his two revolvers, and had almost succeeded in gaining possession of them when Tom turned.

A number of men crowded against him, the light was put out, and he felt that his shirt was being slashed on both sides, one of the knives making a slight wound; at the same time he was seized and pushed toward the door.

Seeing in a moment his only hope, he resisted, and, as the pressure became greater, he sprang through the open door, drawing his bowie and turning, and with his head down, and muscles well set, made a dash back into the party who had surrounded him.

Before they could recover from their surprise at his quickness, he cut two of them, and at the same time, drawing one of his revolvers, he opened fire upon the crowd.

Two men fell.

At once there was a general scattering, and, although there were a number of shots fired, Tom was only grazed once.

Shooting-scenes like this were familiar to most of those that witnessed it, and one heard in the crowd that soon collected around the wounded men such exclamations as:

"He's a good one!"

"After his money, hey?"

"Served them right. Where's the rest?"

"I say, stranger, are you hurt?"

"No."

"That's lucky."

As soon as Tom could get rid of some of his questioners, he asked:

"Where's the gurl I was with?"

"There, yonder, by the man you shot. The other one's dead; and I reckon that one is near being ditto."

Tom moved up to the side of the dying man, and heard the girl say:

"Oh, father, don't say that! What will become of me? What shall I do?"

And, although Tom knew that she was directly connected with the robbers, yet no harsh feeling had he for her.

He moved up at once to the side of the dying man, the crowd giving way, and, stooping down, said compassionately:

"Luck's agin' yer; ken I dew anything fur yer?"

"Yes, it is. Close shave for you. If my girl Katie, here, hadn't have lost her nerve, you'd have been singing with the angels now."

At that moment the blood gushed out of his mouth, and he became unconscious, and a doctor, who happened to be present, and who was holding his hand, said:

"He's only a few minutes to live."

At that Curley—for it was this noted leader of robbers—opened his eyes and beckoned for Tom to stoop close.

"I know I can trust you, Tom. My name is George Jackson. Live in Springfield, Illinois. Father is a minister there. Send my girl to him. Forgive Katie; I made her do it. Will you?"

As Tom pressed his hand in assent, Curley became unconscious again, and remained so until his death, which took place a few minutes afterward.

Tom fulfilled his promise—took Curley's daughter, Katie, to her grandfather—and, time having softened things, at the end of two years brought her out again as his wife.

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